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19  
THE APOCALYPSE.

A SERIES OF SPECIAL LECTURES

ON THE

Revelation of Jesus Christ.

WITH

REVISED TEXT

BY

J. A. SEISS, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "THE LAST TIMES," "THE GOSPEL IN LEVITICUS," "PARALLELS  
OF THE TEN VIRGINS," "LECTURES ON HEBREWS," ETC. ETC.

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## NOTE.

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# THE APOCALYPSE.

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## LECTURE FIRST.

THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE SUBJECT IS TAKEN UP—THE PREFACE—THE SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK—WHAT THE REVELATION OF CHRIST IS—JOHN IN THE DAY OF THE LORD—THE DERIVATION OF THE APOCALYPSE—THE VALUE AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS BOOK—OUR SPECIAL STUDY DEMANDED.

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REV. CHAP. 1 : 1-13 (Revised Text).—The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must come to pass speedily ; and he signified [it] sending by his angel to his servant John ; who attested the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, what things soever he saw. Blessed he who readeth, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and observe the things which are written in it : for the time [is] near.

IT has been upon my mind, and in my heart, for a long time, to deliver a series of special discourses upon this remarkable portion of the Holy Scriptures ; not from a conceit of superior wisdom or spiritual gifts ;—not with the vain ambition of making all mysteries plain,—nor yet out of mere curious desire to pry into the things of the future ; but out of solemn reverence for all that God has caused to be written for our learning, with a view conscientiously to declare the whole counsel of

God, and with an earnest desire to secure for myself and those who hear me that special benediction which is pronounced upon them that read, hear, and keep what is written in this prophecy.

I have delayed the commencement of this work till now, partly on account of the bodily infirmities under which I have labored for the past two years, and partly because I desired first to qualify myself better by ampler investigation, and by a more thorough mastery of the difficulties which have hindered the success of other attempts to explain this book. And, for the same reasons, I am unable, even now, to promise the continuation of these discourses, except at irregular intervals. So far, however, as God shall give me strength, I shall pursue them to their end.

I am also very sure, as God has promised his Spirit to them that ask him, and directed those who lack wisdom to seek for it at his hands, and pronounced all inspired writings to be "for our learning" and comfort, that it will be profitable for all of us, in humble dependence upon Divine grace and guidance, carefully to review what this book was meant to teach.

And may I not ask you, to give me your attention, as I proceed with these expositions, and to unite with me in earnestly invoking God's helpful illuminations, that we may rightly understand his solemn message to his people.

The words which I have announced for our present consideration, give us the Divine Preface or superscription to this book. They are meant



to advise the reader as to that with which he is about to deal, and to prepare him to appreciate what is to follow. They relate to three leading points:

I. THE SUBJECT AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.

II. ITS DERIVATION AND AUTHORSHIP.

III. ITS VALUE AND PRECIOUSNESS.

Let us look briefly at these several particulars.

What concerns the subject and contents of this book, I find for the most part in the name which it gives itself. It is the common rule with Scripture names, to express the substance of the things to which they are applied. The name of God expresses what God is; so the names of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the leading names found in the Bible. Even those which the Church has given, are often wonderfully expressive and significant. *Genesis* is the generation of things; *Exodus*, the going forth from bondage; *The Gospel*, the very heart and substance of all God's gracious communications—the good news. And when God himself designates this book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, we may rest assured, that it is the very substance and kernel of the book that is expressed in this title.

What, then, are we to understand by "*The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*?" There are certain books (adopted and held sacred by the Church of Rome, which we, however, receive only as human productions), which have a name somewhat similar to this in sound. You find them in some Bibles, between the Old and New Testaments,

bearing the name of *Apocrypha*. But *Apocrypha* is just the opposite of *Apocalypse*. *Apocrypha* means something that is concealed, not set forth, not authentic; *Apocalypse* means something revealed, disclosed, manifested, shown. The verb *αποκαλύπτω*, means *to reveal, to make manifest, to uncover to view*. The noun *αποκάλυψις*, means *a revelation, a disclosure, an appearing, a making manifest*. The *Apocalypse*, or *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, must therefore be the revealment, manifestation, appearing, of Jesus Christ.

Some accept the words as if they were meant to express the revealment of the Revelation. This I take to be a mistake, and a vital mistake, as regards any right interpretation of this book. It is not the *Apocalypse* which is the subject of the disclosure. This book is not the *Apocalypse of the Apocalypse*, but **THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST**.

And this is the key to the whole book. It is a book of which Christ is the great subject and centre, particularly in that period of his administrations and glory designated as the day of his uncovering, the day of his appearing. It is not a mere prediction of divine judgments upon the wicked, and of the final triumph of the righteous, made known *by* Christ; but a book of the revelation *of* Christ, in his own person, offices, and future administrations, when he shall be *seen* coming from heaven, as he was once seen going into heaven. If "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" meant nothing more than certain communications made

known by Christ, I can see no significance or propriety in affixing this title to this book, rather than to any other books of holy Scripture. Are they not all alike the revelation of Jesus Christ, in this sense? Does not Peter say of the inspired writers in general, that they were moved by the Spirit of Christ which was in them? Why then single out this particular book as "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," when it is no more the gift of Jesus than any other inspired book? Besides, it would be particularly strange, that this book should be so specially designated "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" in the sense of revelation *by* Christ, when the book itself declares that it was not received from Christ, but from *an angel* or messenger of Christ. These considerations alone ought to satisfy us that there is something more distinctive and characteristic in this title than is embraced in its ordinary acceptation. For my own part, I am perfectly convinced, from a review of the places in which the word occurs in the New Testament, as well as from all the contents of this particular part of it, that *The Apocalypse*, or Revelation of Jesus Christ, means Jesus Christ *revealed*, and uncovered to mortal view; and not merely Jesus Christ *revealing*, and making known hidden things to be recorded for our learning. Let me refer to a few passages bearing upon the case.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 : 7), speaks of them as enriched in every spiritual gift, confirmed in the testimony of Christ, and "waiting for *the Apocalypse* (την ἀποκάλυψιν) *the coming of*

our Lord Jesus Christ.” The original word here is exactly the same as that in the text; the structure of the sentence is also much the same; but no one mistakes its meaning for a moment. All agree that it refers to Christ in his revelation from heaven, when he shall come in the clouds with power and great glory. And if such is its unmistakable meaning here, why not take it in the same sense in the text? So in Thessalonians (1 : 6–10) he refers his readers to a time of rest, “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven (*ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ Κυρίου*, literally, *at the Apocalypse of the Lord*), with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God;—*when he shall come* to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” No one misunderstands what The Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus is in this passage. Paul himself explains it to be His *coming*, in just such administrations as were shown John in this book.

So again in 1 Peter 1 : 7, where that apostle speaks of his brethren as “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” that the trial of their faith, “being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory *at the Apocalypse* (*ἐν ἀποκαλύψει*), *appearing* of Jesus Christ.” Also in verse 13, where he exhorts his readers to “be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto them *at the Apocalypse* (*ἐν ἀποκαλύψει*), *the revelation* of Jesus Christ.” All understand the reference in these

passages to be to the coming of Christ in the glory of his second advent, when "every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him." We all feel that it would be a wilful perversion of the word of God to make *the Apocalypse of Christ*, in these passages, mean anything else than his *personal appearing*. And the same is the fixed meaning of this phrase in every other passage in which it is used. Even in that from Galatians (1:12), which might seem to assign it a different signification, the idea is not simply that of a revealer, but of one revealed by personal manifestation. Paul there avers, that the gospel he preached was not of man; "for," says he, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by *the Apocalypse* (ὁ ἀποκαλύψεως) *through the revelation* of Jesus Christ;" that is, by Christ's personal *appearance* to him, as the succeeding verses show; for he straightway proceeds to narrate that marvellous affair on the way to Damascus. What that Apocalypse was, he on various occasions described. Before Agrippa, he said,—“As I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in a Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest, but rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have *appeared unto*

*thee* for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou *hast seen*, and of those things in which *I will appear unto thee*." Hence his appeal in vindication of his apostleship. "Am I not an apostle? Have I not *seen Jesus Christ* our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1.) All this shows, as conclusively as may be, that the Apocalypse of Christ, through which he obtained at once his office and his text, was a *personal appearance*, as every real Apocalypse predicated of a person must be.

With the meaning of this word thus established, what can that book be, of which it is descriptive, but an account of the revelation of Christ in his personal forthcoming from his present invisible estate, to receive his Bride, judge the wicked, and set up his eternal kingdom on the earth.

With this also agrees the statement of John as to the circumstances under which he came to the knowledge of the things which he narrates. He says he "*was in Spirit in the Lord's day*," in which he beheld what he afterwards wrote. What is meant by this *Lord's day*? Some answer, *Sunday*—the first day of the week; but I am not satisfied with this explanation. Sunday belongs indeed to the Lord, but the Scriptures nowhere call it "the Lord's day." None of the Christian writings, for 100 years after Christ, ever call it "the Lord's day." But there is a "*Day of the Lord*" largely treated of by prophets, apostles, and fathers, the meaning of which is abundantly clear and settled. It is that day in which, Isaiah



says, men shall hide in the rocks for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty;—the day which Joel describes as the day of destruction from the Almighty, when the Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake;—the day to which the closing chapter of Malachi refers as the day that shall burn as an oven, and in which the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings;—the day which Paul proclaimed from Mars' Hill as that in which God will judge the world, concerning which he so earnestly exhorted the Thessalonians, and which was not to come until after a great apostacy from the faith, and the ripening of the wicked for destruction;—the day in the which, Peter says, the heavens shall be changed, the elements melt, the earth burn, and all present orders of things give way to new heavens and a new earth;—even “the day for which all other days were made.” And in that day I understand John to say, he in some sense was. In the mysteries of prophetic rapport, which the Scriptures describe as “*in Spirit*,” and which Paul declared inexplicable, he was caught out of himself, and out of his proper place and time, and stationed amid the stupendous scenes of the great day of God, and made to see the actors in them, and to look upon them transpiring before his eyes, that he might write what he saw, and give it to the Churches.

This is what I understand by his being “in

Spirit in the Lord's day."\* I can see no essential difference between ἡ Κυριακή ἡμέρα—the *Lord's day*,—and ἡ ἡμέρα Κυρίου—the *day of the Lord*. They are simply the two forms for signifying the same relations of the same things.† And if John was thus mystically down among the scenes of the last day, and has written only what he says he has written, that is "*things that he saw*;" it cannot be otherwise but that in dealing with the contents of this book we are dealing with what relates pre-eminently to the great Apocalypse and Epiphany of our Lord, when he cometh to judge the world in righteousness.

And when we come to consider the actual contents of this book, we find them harmonizing exactly with this understanding of its title. It takes as its chief and unmistakable themes what other portions of the Scriptures assign to the great day

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\* And so Wetstein, Züllig, Dr. S. R. Maitland, Dr. Todd, and B. W. Newton.

† Our English Translators have frequently used both these modes of expressing the genitive case of the same noun, both in Hebrew and Greek. Compare Gen. 28 : 17 and Gen. 28 : 22, where "House of God" and "God's house" mean precisely the same. So "Lord's law," Ex. 13 : 9, and "Law of the Lord," 2 Chron. 12 : 1;—"The Lord's people," 1 Sam. 2 : 24, and "People of the Lord," Judges 5 : 11. In all these instances the Septuagint presents the same forms as the original. So in the New Testament we have the same variety of expression to signify exactly the same relations. In 1 Cor. 10 : 21, for the same grammatical form in Greek, we have "Lord's table," and "Table of devils;" in 2 Cor. 2 : 12, "Christ's Gospel" for "Gospel of Christ;" in 2 Pet. 4 : 13, "Christ's sufferings," and in 1 Pet. 5 : 1, "Sufferings of Christ." The same may be seen in Rev. 11 : 15, where the kingdoms of the world become our *Lord's* and his *Christ's* kingdoms.



of the Lord. It is nothing but Apoealypse from beginning to end. First we have the Apoealypse of Christ in his relation to the earthly Churches, and his judgment of them; then the Apoealypse of his relation to the glorified Church, and the marshalling of them for his forthcoming to judge the world; then the Apoealypse of his relation to the scenes of the judgment, as they are manifested on earth under the opening of the seals, the prophesying of the witnesses, and the fall of Babylon; then the Apoealypse of his actual manifestation to the world in the battle of the great day of God Almighty, the establishment of his kingdom, and the investiture of the saints in their future sovereignties; and finally the Apoealypse of his relation to the final act of judgment, the destruction of death and the grave, and the introduction of the final estate of a perfected Redemption. What, indeed, is all this, but just what was foretold by all the prophets, by Christ himself, and by all his apostles, as pertaining to THE DAY OF THE LORD? Verily, this book is but the rehearsal, in another and ampler manner, of what all the Scriptures tell us about the last day and the eternal judgment. It is pre-eminently The Apoealypse and Epiphany of Jesus Christ.\*

II. Notice now *its derivation and authorship*. The

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\* "This divine book, let others call it what they please, is an admirable prophecy, directed wholly to the times, immediate upon the coming of the Lord. In which are announced all the principal matters which shall immediately precede; in which is announced in a manner the most magnificent the

text represents it as the gift of God to Christ. It is called "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." Some understand this gift in the sense of *signified, made known to*; and so put themselves under the necessity of explaining how this could be without compromising our Lord's Divinity. This is the first difficulty engendered by the departure from the proper scriptural meaning of the word Apocalypse. People take it as denoting a piece of information, and so represent Christ in a state of ignorance respecting the sublimest results of his mediatorship until after his ascension into heaven. The incongruities of such an acceptance should teach men better. The Apocalypse of Christ is the future reappearance of Christ, clothed with the honors and crowned with the triumphs which are to characterize that forthcoming, and not the mere knowledge or description of these things. And it is that Apocalypse, with all its glorious concomitants and results, that God has, in covenant, given to Christ;—given to him as the crowning reward of his mediatorial work, as the Scriptures everywhere teach.

The promise of the victory of the woman's seed involved this gift. Hannah's song speaks of it as strength and exaltation which the Lord be-

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very coming of the Lord in glory and majesty; in which are announced the admirable and stupendous events which shall accompany that coming, and which shall follow it. The title of the book shows well to what it is all directed; what is its argument, and what its determinate end: *The Apocalypse—Revelation of Jesus Christ.*"—Emanuel Lacunza, "*Coming of Messiah*," p. 200.

stoweth upon his anointed. God's promise to David of a son whose kingdom is to be established forever embraces it. It is the great theme of the second Psalm, where God says to his son: "I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession—thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." It is in Isaiah's pictures of Messiah, in Jeremiah's prophecies, in the words of the annunciation to Mary, in Christ's own parables, and in all the writings of the Apostles. *Because* Christ "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We are told that there was joy set before Christ as the reward of his sufferings and death, and that it was "*for* the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." And whatever else may be included in that exaltation or that joy, highest and greatest of all is a future Apocalypse, when "the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and he shall sit upon the throne of his glory." This, then, is what God

“gave to Jesus Christ,” in promise, when he commenced his work, in its earnest, when he raised him from the dead and received him into glory ; and *thus gave* what constitutes the substance of this book.

But as the full manifestation of this endowment of Christ is still future, and it is important for his followers to be well informed concerning it, the blessed Saviour, after his ascension, took measures to have the facts becomingly communicated to his servants on earth. “*And he sent and signified [the same] by his angel.*” In stating who this angel was, I do not venture to be specific. His own account of himself to John, was, “I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book” (Rev. 22 : 9). From this, it has been thought, that he was one of the old prophets, or some one standing in a closer relation to Christ and the Church than can be affirmed of angels proper. It is also somewhat confirmative of this view, that whilst the angels are called “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1 : 14), they are not called “God’s servants,” nor fellows of the prophets and apostles, as in the case before us. Let it suffice, however, for us to know, that it was some heavenly messenger, commissioned by the Lord Jesus in glory, to come and make known these apocalyptic wonders.

Some have found difficulty in tracing the agency of this angel in the book itself. “It is remarkable,” says one, “that this angel does not appear as the impartor of the visions until chapter seven-

teen.” This would imply, that what God here says about the derivation of this book is only true with respect to a very small fraction of it. I cannot agree thus to stint and stultify the words of the Almighty. The proper explanation of the office of the angel is to be found in the words *signified* and *saw*. The word rendered *signified*, taken in connection with the fact that the things signified were matters of contemplation by means of the eyes, can denote nothing else than an actual picturing of those scenes—a making of them pass before the view the same as if they were really transpiring. The office of the angel, then, as I take it, was, to form the connection between John’s senses or imagination and the things which he was to describe, making to pass in review before him what was only afterwards to take place in fact. How this was done, I cannot say: but as the devil could take Jesus to a high mountain, and show him at one view “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,” I am sure that it falls sufficiently within the sphere of angelic natures thus to picture things to man; and that when commissioned of the Lord for the purpose, no good angel is wanting in ability to be the instrument in making John *see* whatever visions he describes in this book. And when God himself tells me that what is here set forth *was* thus signified to John, I will persist in referring every one of the visions, with all that he says he saw and heard, to the intervention of this angelic agent, and believe that in all sacred things we are vastly

more dependent upon angelic ministrations than we know or can understand. "*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*" (Heb. 1:14.)

But there is still another link in the chain of agencies through which the great things of this book have been made known to men. Given of God, sent by Christ, signified by an angel, they were finally recorded by John, and by him communicated to the Churches.

Nor need we be in doubt as to what John this is. The text describes him as that "John, who attested the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." And who is it that the Churches from the beginning have known as the attestor of the *Logos*, or Word of God, and of the testimony which Christ gave, but John the Apostle, the beloved disciple? Turn to the Gospel by John, and see whether it be not wholly taken up with exactly these things. The first chapter gives the only full account which the Scriptures contain respecting the pre-existence of the *Logos*, or Word, in the Godhead, and the sameness of that Word with him who was born of Mary, tabernacled in the flesh, and was called Jesus of Nazareth. Was not this bearing "record of the Word of God?" Do we not find another summary of the same testimony in the first chapter of his first epistle? What else does he mean of the account which he gives of his testimony, when he says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have



looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life, declare we unto you?" Are not both his first and second epistles but arguments, against various evil spirits which were gone abroad, that Jesus is the Word of God, the only Christ, the Son of God, and that all who deny this are liars and Antichrist? And in reference to the great body of his Gospel, does he not himself say, "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name?" Does not all this make out for John a particular distinction as the apostle "who attested the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ?"

Some say that it was not John the Apostle who wrote this book, but another John, contemporaneous with the apostle. But it is not yet conclusively proven that there was such a John other than the apostle; and, if there even was, there is not the first tittle of evidence that he had ever distinguished himself for his record concerning the Logos, or concerning the testimonies, which he himself saw, by which Christ announced himself as the Messiah and the Son of God. I conclude, therefore, upon the solid basis of God's own identification of the author of this book, that it was the Apostle John who wrote it.

Such also has been the conviction of the best portions of the Church from the beginning. For the first two centuries the universal Christian testimony ascribed the Apocalypse to the pen of

“that disciple whom Jesus loved.” In the third century, out of a desire to get rid of its authority for certain unpalatable doctrines, there were some who ascribed it to Cerinthus, a reputed heretic of the first century. But, “if the common consent of all antiquity is to overturn the heady rashness of well-meaning but inconsiderate men of evil name; then we have the most satisfactory evidence that this book was written by John the Apostle, and believed by the Church to be most fully inspired. Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clements Alexandrinus, Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and a continued stream of Orthodox authority to our day, from the age next to that in which it was written, concur in the reception, the admiration, and the observance of this book.”\*

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\* Irving *in loc.* Some have sought to make a great deal of certain alleged discrepancies between the style and modes of expression used in the Apocalypse, and those contained in John’s Gospel and Epistles. But Alford has very well observed, that “there are at the same time striking notes of similarity in expression and east of thought,” and that “we are not in a position to take into account the effect of a totally different subject and totally different circumstances upon one, who though knowing and speaking Greek, was yet a Hebrew by birth.”—*Greek Test. Prol. Rev.*

And one of our ablest linguists and critics, “after an examination successively renewed through many years,” says, “I have never been able to satisfy myself, that what has been the common belief of the Churches in all ages respecting the authorship of the Apocalypse, is not sustained by more and better grounds than any other opinion.”—*Stuart on Apoc.*, I, 285.

“There is scarcely a book in the whole Bible whose genuineness and inspiration were more strongly attested on its first appearance than the Apocalypse. No doubts whatever seem



Such, then, is the exalted source and derivation of this wonderful production. It takes its origin in God's covenant gift to Jesus Christ as the reward of triumph and glory for his humiliation and obedience unto death. It was sent by the loving Saviour from heaven, in the charge of an angelic messenger, to be shown to John. And by the hands of "that disciple whom Jesus loved," thus visited in his lonely exile—emblem of that consolation in distress with which this book has ever irradiated the dark and gloomy days of the Church,—was traced out in the language of mortals, and delivered over as Christ's last message to his people on earth.

### III. A word or two now as *to the value and pre-*

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to have been entertained on these points. Suffice it now to say, that Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Melito,—that is, eminent teachers in the Church, in the next age to that in which it was written—proclaim that its writer was St. John, the beloved disciple of Christ. Such was *then* the voice of the Church."—*Wordsworth on Apoc.*, p. 22.

"So ends our Catena of testimonies to the genuineness and divine inspiration of the Apocalypse traced through the three half centuries that followed after its publication. Alike from East and West, North and South,—from the Churches of the Asiatic province and the Syrian, of Italy and of Gaul, of Egypt and of Africa,—we have heard an unbroken and all but uniform voice of testimony in its favor. And on the whole, and in conclusion, it does appear to me that Augustine and the Latin Council had good reason for their solemn verdict; and that we may safely and unhesitatingly direct our inquiries into the meaning of the Apocalypse, as into that of a prophecy of the future, revealed to the beloved disciple, by none other than Christ's own divine, eternal, omniscient Spirit."—*Elliott's Horæ Apoc.*, *Præl. Essay*.

*ciousness of this book.* A gift which the Great God thinks a befitting honor and compensation to Christ for all his great deeds of love and condescension; a thing which the blessed Lord in heaven esteemed of sufficient moment to be made known by a special embassy, which holy angels considered it an honor to be permitted to signify, and which the tenderness of the disciple of love so conscientiously recorded for the comfort and admonition of the people of God in every age, certainly is not a thing of trifling significance. If we are interested in the story of the manger and the cross; if we can draw strength for our prayers and hopes by invoking Christ by the mystery of his incarnation, fasting, temptation, agony, and bloody sweat; if we find it such a precious treasure to our souls to come into undoubting sympathy with the scenes of his humiliation and grief; what should be our appreciation of this book, which treats of the fruits of those sufferings, and tells only of that wronged Saviour's glory and triumphs, and shows us our Lord enthroned in majesty, riding prosperously, and scattering to his ransomed ones the crowns and regencies of empire which shall never perish, and celestial blessednesses without number and above all thought!

"All Scripture," indeed, "is profitable, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" but there are some portions more especially signi-

fielant and preeious, and proper attention to which is fraught with partieular advantages. Of this sort is this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. What saith the text?—"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." The same is repeated in echapter 22: 7,—“Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Of eourse, the more we learn and know of Christ, the better it will be for us, if the spirit of faith and obedience be in our hearts; and this book is pre-eminently the Revelation of Christ. It sets out our blessed Lord, and draws away the veil which hangs between us and him, and lifts us up into the sublimest things of heaven. It shows us how the Son of man has been rewarded by the Father, and what works and offees are assigned unto that meek Lamb. It shows us the history of our Saviour's person, all-glorious and exalted, and his great ministrations in the Church and in the universe, until his eoming again from the throne and in the power of the Father, with all the armies of heaven with him. Above all does it dwell upon that great Apoealypse, the eondition in which it will find the world, what it will bring to his prepared and waiting saints, what it will inflict upon lukewarm believers, infidels, and evil-doers, and what will be the charaeter and issues of that great day of God Almighty. It tells what the Church will be till Christ comes, what it will be in that period of dreadful trial, what Satan and his children will attempt, and how the

Lord Jesus shall trample them down under the glory of his power, raise the dead, renew the world, and set up forever his blessed reign in it. It shows us what will be the final triumphs and rewards of the saints for their present griefs and toils; what will be the future of our world; how it is to be renewed, cleansed, beautified, and invested with heavenly excellencies; and how the light, and knowledge and glory of God is to become its eternal possession.

It is always important for us to be forewarned with regard to the future. It is our nature to be forecasting, and it is one of the necessities of our well-being to be able to anticipate with accuracy, at least with regard to the leading things that shall concern us. He who does not shape the conduct of to-day with reference to some end foreseen or calculated on for some other day, is a mere fool and madman, whether it be in the things of God, or in the things of the world. And in this book we are certified beforehand of what God hath determined concerning the future—what the devout may hope for, what the indifferent and unbelieving have to fear, wherein the true safety and consolation of man is to be found, what tribulations are to come upon the world, and what birth-pangs are yet to be passed through to reach that Golden Age of which prophets and poets of all nations and times have spoken.\*

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\* “The Apocalypse *completes* the Canon of Scripture; and with reverence be it said, the sacred Canon would be imperfect without it.”—*Wordsworth*.

There is also a peculiar efficacy and power in the doctrine of Christ's speedy return. Like a magnet, it lifts the heart of the believer out of the world, and out of his low self, and enables him to stand with Moses on the mount, and transfigures him with the rays of blessed hope and promise which stream upon him in those sublime heights. It is the most animating and most sanctifying subject in the Bible. It is the soul's serenest light amid the darkness and trials of earth. And the great end and aim of this book is to set forth this doctrine. The things of which it treats, are things touching the Apoealypse of Jesus Christ, and which it describes as "things which must shortly come to pass." *The impending Advent* is the theme which pervades it from its commencement to its close. And just in proportion as he who is awake to the great truth of the Saviour's speedy coming, and is engaged in waiting and preparing himself accordingly, is a better man, and in a safer condition, and really more happy, than the half-christian and the lukewarm;—in that same proportion is he who reads, hears and keeps the words of this prophecy blessed beyond all other people. This book, at least its subject-matter, thus becomes to him an instrument of security and attainment to save him from surprise when his Lord cometh, and from the tribulations which shall try the indifferent; as well as a passport to admit him to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to the highest awards of eternity. Precious book! and happy they who study it!

Nor can I close without remarking how all this plucks up, and crushes to atoms, those erroneous and mischievous notions entertained by many, that there is nothing useful in prophetic studies. To say nothing of the duty of giving heed to what God has thought it important to record, or of the folly of seeing only peril in trying to understand what the Spirit of God has inspired for our learning and consolation, what man is he, who, in the face of this text, and its outspoken benediction, will venture to denounce investigation into sacred prophecy? What if it is often dark and mysterious? The darker and more difficult, the greater the reason for earnest examination. Be the obscurity and mystery what it may, God says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words, and keep those things which are written." What if this book of Revelation is the fullest of all of dark things and perplexing mysteries? It is then a book which above all needs our most solemn and studious attention. Nay, it is concerning this book especially that God pronounces this blessedness upon the devout and obedient inquirer.

Some tell us that what is yet future ought not to be examined into till after it has come to pass. I can hardly realize that this is seriously meant. Yet I have had it argued to me, even in Jerusalem itself. Do such persons not perceive that they thus judge God, and Christ, and the sent angel of Christ, and John the beloved disciple of Christ, and join issue with the God of truth as to the



correctness of his utterances? I find also that those who so argue are prone to insist that the day of death is the same as Christ's coming. Do they then mean that a man is only to study the predictions of that coming after he is dead? Out upon such doctrine as this! Away with such presumptuous deprivation of the Church of the precious legacy left her by her ascended Lord! I will not for a moment regard that as wrong and dangerous which the Lord himself hath pronounced *blessed*. Jesus knew what he was about when he sent this book to be shown unto his servants. He understood his own words when he said and repeated: Blessed is he that reads and he that keeps what is in this book. And I will insist that it is to be studied. As Christ said to the writer of it, so he says to all his ministers, and all his people, in all time: "SEAL NOT THE SAYINGS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK." It is an open book, and meant to be ever kept open to the view of the Church from that time forward to the end. Woe, then, to the man who undertakes to draw away God's people from it, or to warn them against looking into it! He takes from the Church, which has now been these 2000 years among the dashing waves, the chart by which above all Christ meant she should be guided, and wherein she may best see whither she is bearing, what are her perils, and where her course of safety lies! He undertakes to seal what God has said should not be sealed! He not only "takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy,"

(which who does, "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,") but seeks to take away the book itself!

And the more dangerous and reprehensible is such a course, now that "the time is near." Nearly two thousand years ago, it was said of the things herein written, that they must speedily come to pass. These records were from the first pressed upon the study of the Church by the solemn consideration that the period of their fulfilment was rapidly approaching. But if this argument was of force then, how much more now?

Standing, then, as we do, upon the very margin of the great Apocalypse, by all the solemnities with which it is to be accompanied, I not only invite and recommend, but conjure Christians, as they hope to be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not to put this precious book from them, or to forego the faithful study of its contents.

The Lord open our hearts to its teachings, and make us partakers of the blessings it foretells!



## LECTURE SECOND.

JOHN'S SPECIAL INTRODUCTION—CHRISTIANITY COURTEOUS—  
THE CHURCHES—THE BLESSING IMploRED UPON THEM—AN  
EXULTANT ASCRIPTION—THE BASIS AND CHARACTER OF IT  
—A SOLEMN PROPHETIC ALLUSION—THE COMING AGAIN OF  
CHRIST—HOW THE EARLY CHRISTIANS VIEWED THE SUB-  
JECT—A DEVOUT REFERENCE TO THE SAVIOUR'S TESTIMONY  
CONCERNING HIMSELF.

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REV. CHAP. 1 : 4-8 (Revised Text).—John to the seven churches in Asia, Grace unto you and peace, from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits which [are<sup>1</sup> before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness, The First-born of the dead, and The Prince of the kings of the earth.

Unto Him that loves us, and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom,—priests unto Him who is his God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

Behold, he cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall mourn about him. Even so; Amen.

I am Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

**T**HERE is not another book of holy scripture which opens with so much special remark and solemnity. There is everything here to impress the belief, that there is not another so profoundly important, or meant to be studied with such particular care and seriousness. We have had before us the impressive account of itself with which this

marvellous book opens. The text is a special additional preface, by John, which will be quite sufficient to occupy us to-night. Strictly, it is no part of the Apocalypse. It has proceeded from the same Spirit, and is in a measure anticipative of its contents ; but it deals more with the writer's personal feelings, than with any features of the grand message itself. It is the mere prelude to the piece—the apostolic overture to the Revelation of Christ. But, it is a magnificent introduction. Though marked with the frequent sententious abruptness of this apostle's writings, there is not, in all human literature, a more sublime or appropriate opening. Separating it into its several parts, I find

- I. AN AFFECTING SALUTATION ;
- II. AN EXULTANT ASCRIPTION ;
- III. A SOLEMN PROPHETIC ALLUSION ;
- IV. A DEVOUT THEOLOGICAL RECOGNITION.

Having carefully surveyed these, we shall have comprehensively explored the whole text. May the Lord aid us in the attempt, and fill us with the Spirit of him whose words we are to consider!

As to the Salutation, we may note first that Christianity is courteous. It enlivens all kindly feelings, and prompts to every gentle amenity from one to another. There is no refinement of manner, or polish of feeling and behavior, which it does not foster. Coarseness and vulgarity have no place in the domain of genuine piety. He who speaks in the text was bred in humble life, but, by

the exalting power of the gospel which he preached, he was raised into a courtliness of tone and temper, as sincere as it was lovely. He does not venture to deliver his great message to the Churches without first declaring his own kind wishes towards them. Though a high officer, and addressing persons of much inferior estate to himself, his loving heart begins with the pouring out of gracious affection, sympathy and benediction. By apostolic example, then, as well as by apostolic precept, we are taught to be kindly affectioned one toward another, and to be courteous to all men.

This gracious Salutation is addressed "to the seven Churches in Asia." We sometimes speak of "the Church" in its entire collective capacity, as if it were but one body. And such it really is in its source, head, faith and sacraments, but not in its earthly organization. We also speak of the Church of a particular country or denomination; and not improperly when we wish to designate clusters of Churches of particular and distinctive type, or regime, or geographical contiguity. But the Scriptures express themselves differently. They do not contemplate the Christians of so many countries or confessions, as so many Churches; but find a Church in every individual congregation, having its own minister, elders and deacons, without regard to any corporation other than itself. "Asia" is a large district of country, lying on the north of the Mediterranean, east of the outlet of the Euxine. It had but one general govern-

ment at the time. But the Apocalypse does not speak of the collective body of Christians on that territory as "the Church of Asia." They were organized into distinct congregations in the several towns and cities, and these separate and independent assemblies are spoken of as so many "Churches." They are addressed singly as "the Churches which are in Asia," such as "the Church in Ephesus," "the Church in Smyrna," "the Church in Pergamos," &c. The ecclesiastical unit is, therefore, to be reckoned from the local assembly under one minister, and such helpers as may be grouped around him, in the acknowledgment and the administration of the commands of Christ. These several units, or any number of them, may lawfully join together in other and more general organizations and administrations, but never so as to ignore or supersede the proper churchly character of each without regard to the rest. The original order of the Church, as the apostles founded it, and as they addressed and left it, is *congregational*. And every system which obliterates that order, in so far departs from what God and his inspired servants have authorized and ordained. John knew of no Churches but the individual congregations, however they might voluntarily come together for mutual counsel and general edification.

Note also the style and substance of this Salutation. Such addresses were common in the intercourse of the ancients. Their writers were accustomed to wish to their readers every good

and prosperity. The Egyptian steward greeted the Hebrew strangers with the words—"Peace be to you." The Assyrian King headed his royal proclamation with—"Peace be multiplied unto you." And David sent to Nabal saying: "Peace be to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast." The like may be heard to this day, in the common salutations of the people of those lands. But never did Jew or Gentile give such a salutation as this. It is not the ordinary prosperity of the world which is here bespoken, but something infinitely higher. John wishes the Churches "peace" indeed, but a peace preceded by, and rooted in "Grace." No one, in his right mind, will despise the comforts and blessings of this life. They are all good and precious gifts of God, which are to be thankfully received and devoutly appropriated. But, what is all this world's prosperity if there be no peace with God, and no spiritual consolation in the conscience? Of what avail is it to pass brilliantly over the stage of time, only to sink forever in the darkness and sorrows of eternity! What we sinful beings need is *Grace*, and the peace which has its root in grace. "By the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified." There must be some outlet of Divine benignity by which we can be accepted notwithstanding these disabilities under the law. That outlet has been found in the Gospel, which publishes absolution and eternal life on the simple condition of faith. And this is that "Grace" of which the apostle speaks, and

by which Paul declares Christians to be saved. It is God's favor to us in Christ Jesus, notwithstanding our fallen condition. It is the forgiveness of sins, the inspiration of a new life, the renewal of the soul to holiness. It is the removal of God's wrath from us and our purgation from all enmity towards God, reconciliation and atonement with our Maker, and full participation in all the blessings of his uninterrupted favor. It is justification, and all the peace with God, and in our own hearts and estate, resulting from justification. In other words, what the apostle here bespeaks upon the Churches is, the entire fulness of the blessing of the Gospel, in all its length and breadth and depth and height of consolation and eternal prosperity.

Notice also the sources from which he implores all this. From man, no such blessings could come; nor yet only from God as God, or from this or that person in the Godhead alone. The whole Deity in its mysterious and eternal Triunity is concerned in furnishing what is bespoken. It is first of all "*from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come;*" that is, from the Absolute One, who knows no change, no dependence on time or place, but to whom the present, the past, and the future are one and the same eternal now; who is, and who was, and who is to be, even the infinite, incomprehensible, unapproachable Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift, and with whom is neither variableness, nor the least shadow of turning.

Hence the joyful thanksgiving, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope."

✓ In the next place it is "*from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;*" that is, from the Holy Ghost, in the full completeness of his office and powers, as sent forth for the illumination, comfort and edification of all the subjects of God's redeeming grace. "Seven" is the number of dispensational fulness and perfection; and as there are seven Churches, making the one Church, so there are "the seven Spirits of God," making up the completeness of the one gracious administration of the Holy Ghost. "*Before the throne;*" that is, connected with the throne, and fulfilling the purposes of Him who sits upon the throne. The Holy Ghost is one sent. (Jno. 14:26.) He goeth forth from the throne, and serves in behalf of the throne. He is God himself *imparted* to work in his elect the good pleasure of his own will, making his grace availing in them and for them, filling them with "all peace and joy in believing," helping their infirmities, witnessing to their adoption, and carrying into effect all the divine administrations of the kingdom of grace.

But there is a third, from whom these great blessings are implored—"from *Jesus Christ.*" There is neither grace nor peace for man, except through Christ. He is the stone which was set at naught by the builders, who is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any



other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4 : 11, 12.) If God the Father hath begotten us again to a lively hope, it is only "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." If we now have liberty to enter into the holiest, it is only "by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." (Heb. 10 : 19, 20.) And if there cometh to us peace, it is because "this man is our peace," and standeth and feedeth in the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. (Micah 5 : 4, 5.)

And as three titles are given to each of the other sources of grace and peace to the Churches, three are also given to Christ. If the eternal Father is He which is, and which was, and which is to come; if the Holy Ghost is spirit, sevenfold, and before the throne: Jesus Christ is "*the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.*" Isaiah prophesied of him as "A witness to the peoples: a leader and commander of the peoples." God said of him, "I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth," and his throne "as a faithful witness in heaven." (Is. 55 : 4; Ps. 89 : 27, 37.) And as was predicted, so it has come to pass. "To this end was I born," says he, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Having died a martyr to his testimony, and given his life an offering for sin, he was restored to life again, as all the Scrip-



tures witness, and became "the first fruits of the resurrection," "the first-born from the dead." And having been "faithful unto death," God hath exalted him, far above all principalities and powers, that at his name every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Conceive of these three, then, as one Almighty and ineffable Godhead,—the Father in the absoluteness of his unchanging nature and universal presence, the Spirit in all the completeness of his manifold energies and diversified operations, and the Son in the virtues of his blood-sealed testimony, of the new begotten power of his resurrection, and of the super-royal administrations of his eternal kingdom, each in his place, and all as one, laid under contribution, and unreservedly and irrevocably pledged, for the blessedness of them that believe;—sound the depths of such a fountain of good; test the firmness of such a basis of confidence; survey the strength and majesty of such a refuge for the soul; weigh the treasures of bliss which are opened up in such a presentation; and you may begin to form some conception of the resources of the saints, and of the real breadth and joyousness of this apostolic Salutation to the Churches. Is it any wonder that John's heart took fire at the contemplation, or that he should abruptly pass from affectionate greeting to jubilant doxology? Surely "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is set on high."

II. Let us look, then, for a few moments at this exultant Ascription. He does not even name the object of it. He seems for the time to be so bewildered among the glories of the Godhead as not to distinguish whether but one, or three, are embraced in his joyous adoration. He speaks of One who loves, and one who atones, and one who renders this love and atonement effective to our deliverance and exultation; and yet includes the three in one, giving glory and dominion forever and ever unto Him that loves us, and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and made us a kingdom, priests unto his Father and his God. But before he completes the sentence, his rapt heart settles upon Him alone whose Apocalypse he is about to unfold. A higher testimony to the proper Deity of Christ could not well be given. He also runs together the present, the past, and the future in the same conception, as in the previous description of God himself. He speaks of an exercise of Divine love, which *now is* (*ἀγαπᾶντι*, *loves*; not *ἀγαπησαντι*, *loved*); of a cleansing by blood, which *has* taken place; and of a regency and priestly dignity which remains to be realized in its fulness hereafter. All these are embraced in the grace and peace of which he had just spoken, and each separately, as well as all conjointly, is made the subject of sublime praise to Him from whom it proceeds. Observe the particular specifications.

The ever adorable One "*loves us.*" We are apt to think of the great love of God as past; as having spent its greatest force, and reached its

highest culmination, when he gave his only begotten Son to humiliation and death in our behalf. But in this we are mistaken. That love is *a present love*, and in as full force at this moment as when it delivered up Jesus to the horrors which overwhelmed him on the cross. Nay, the greatest stress and perfection of it is in exercise now, being the more intensified by reason of what was there so meekly endured for us. That was a love for enemies; what must it then be for friends? That was for man in his unloveliness and sins;—what must it then be for those who have been washed from their sins, and clothed in all the heavenly beauty of the Saviour's righteousness? That was a love for the self-ruined and the lost, without claim upon Divine compassion; what must it then be to the redeemed, who are recommended by all the worth and claims of the sinlessness, and unswerving obedience, and high Divinity of Christ? Oh, the breadth, the length, the depth, the height, of the love of Christ! Who shall measure it? Who can comprehend it? It encompasses us like a shoreless, bottomless sea. It passeth knowledge. It transeends all thought. And it is in full force *now*, to make us forever blessed. Alas, what Doxology is strong enough adequately to acknowledge it?

*“And freed us from our sins by his own blood.”*

We are prone to overlook this as an accomplished fact. As we refer the height of the Divine love and compassion to the past, and so diminish the comfort which belongs to us from it as a present

reality; so we are too apt to refer our absolution in Christ's blood to some future attainment, and to hold back from the proper appropriation of its virtue except as connected with certain works or experiences of our own. In both instances we are grievously at fault. As God's great love, in all its fulness, is a present love; so our absolution through the blood of Christ is a *past* absolution. We have not to wait and work to be forgiven. The work has long since been done. The decree went forth, the releasing word was spoken, the forgiveness was declared, when Jesus left his tomb; and all that any man has to do on that subject is to believe it, and to appropriate to himself the glorious reprieve. What saith the Scripture? "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned." (Jno. 3 : 17, 18.) What of "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us?" Has not Jesus long since entirely disposed of it? Does not the apostle testify that He hath blotted it out, and taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross? (Col. 2 : 14.) Is it not written, that "there is now therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?" (Rom. 8 : 1.) And in the light of passages like these, I should stultify the message which God has given me to deliver, and detract from the richness of that Gospel which I am ordained to preach, if I did not come to you with the blessed announce-

ment of a pardon already passed, and a complete absolution already spoken, for all your sins, however many or deep-dyed, on the simple condition that you but believe my word, and take the assurance to your souls. And we live beneath our privilege and fail to make the required use of the great expiation which has been wrought, and want in proper appreciation of our Saviour's work, if we do not rise up from our prostration under the law, and east from us forever the whole burden of its condemnation. Can you not feel, even as I pronounce these words, the starting pulsations of that life of freedom which flows down to us from Calvary's cross? Can you not this moment look back to that mysterious and all-availing immolation of the Son of God, and believe that it was the taking away of your guilt, even yours? O my downeast, sorrowing brother, look, look, at that scene of sacred bloodshedding; weigh the virtues of that expiation; fathom the depths of its power; realize the blessedness of its efficacy; behold in that day of atonement the incoming of thy year of jubilee, breaking thy bonds, returning to thee thy lost estate, restoring thee to thy unfallen friends; and see if there be not cause for some Miriam's song of triumph—some reason for thee to join in this joyous doxology.

*“And made us a kingdom—priests unto his God and Father.”* The glory brightens as the account proceeds. That we should have a place in the affectionate regard, and tender, effective love of the great Lord, is much. That we should have

forgiveness for all our sins, made perfect by his free grace at the cost of his own life's blood, is almost too much for belief. But, to affection is added honor, and to salvation, official dignities. We are not only loved, and freed from our sins, but, if indeed we are Christians, we are princes and priests, named and anointed for immortal regencies and eternal priesthoods. Let men despise and condemn religion as they may, there is empire connecting with lowly discipleship, royalty with penitence and prayers, and sublime priesthood with piety. Fishermen and taxgatherers, by listening to Jesus, presently find themselves in apostolic thrones, and ministering as priests and rulers of a dispensation, wide as the world, and lasting as time. Moses, by his faith, rises from Jethro's sheepfold to be the prince of Israel; and Daniel, from the den of condemnation and death, to the honor and authority of empire; and Luther, from his cell, to dictate to kings and rule the ages. There is not a believer, however obscure or humble, who may not rejoice in princely blood, who does not already wield a power which the potencies of hell cannot withstand, and who is not on the way to possess eternal priesthood and dominion.

Consider, then, what is embraced in the priestly reign of the saints in the ages to come,—“what untried forms of happy being, what cycles of revolving bliss,” are before us in those high spheres,—what sceptres are to be wielded and what altars served amid the sublimities of our im-



mortal destiny,—what streams of ascending influence shall concentrate in those holy administrations, letting forth God to his creatures, and guiding the adoration of realms unknown as yet to the unsearchable bosom of the invisible God;—and who that believes does not feel his heart stirred to its profoundest depths, and the devout ascription of “glory and dominion forever and ever” rising unbidden to his lips, unto Him who so loved us, and has done such great things for us? “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works toward the children of men!”

III. But we pass to another topic, in which we find a pre-eminently solemn prophetic Allusion. The mention of these kinghoods and priesthoods of the saints, and the glory and eternal dominion of Christ, suggests an occurrence which must precede the full realization of these things, both for Christ and his people. And, with his soul on fire with these sublime contemplations, thirsting for the great consummation, and running over with interest in the tidings which he was about to communicate, the loving apostle seems to have felt as if the grand climacteric of time had come: “Behold he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him: and all tribes of the land shall mourn about him. Even so. Amen.”

Again he omits to mention the name of Him of whom he is speaking. There is, however, no room for mistake. This coming One is the same



who freed us from our sins by his own blood, and who is to have glory and dominion forever and ever. John was present when that blessed One left the earth. He had heard the angels say: "Ye men of Galilee, this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11.) He had seen how "a cloud received him out of their sight," and thenceforward carried in his memory what the words of the angels authorized him to regard as a picture of something in the future to which he ever looked with the profoundest interest. And all the stupendous visions of the Apocalypse did not for one moment disturb that picture, or divert his mind from it. However variously he may have been moved, as scene followed scene in the great exhibition of the Divine purpose, the key-note to which he ever returned was the coming and kingdom of that ascended Lord. Even in all the long course of unending ages, that upon which his thoughts most firmly fastened was, the coming again of the Lord Jesus. With this he begins; with this he continues; and with this he ends. But let us separate his words a little, and look at their several implications individually.

"*He cometh.*" Here is the great fact unequivocally stated. Christ has not gone to heaven to stay there. He has gone for his Church's benefit; and for his Church's benefit he will return again; not in spirit only, not in providence only, not in the mere removal of men by death, but in his own

proper person, as “the Son of man.” Few believe this, and still fewer lay it to heart. Many sneer at the very idea, and would fain laugh down the people who are so simple as to entertain it. But it is nevertheless the immutable truth of God, predicated by all his prophets, promised by Christ himself, confirmed by the testimony of angels, proclaimed by all the apostles, believed by all the early Christians, acknowledged in all the Church Creeds, sung of in all the Church Hymn-books, prayed about in all the Church Liturgies, and entering so essentially into the very life and substance of Christianity, that without it there is no Christianity, except a few maimed and mutilated relics too powerless to be worth the trouble or expense of preservation. That religion which does not look for a returning Saviour, or locate its highest hopes and triumphs in the judgment scenes for which the Son of man must reappear, is not the religion of this book, and is without authority to promise salvation to its devotees. And those addresses to the Churches which have no “*Behold he cometh*” pervading or underlying them, have not been indited by “the Seven Spirits of God,” nor sent by Him whose Apocalypse is the crown of the inspired Canon. Murmur at it, dispute it, despise it, mock at it, put it aside, hate it, and hide from it, as men may, it is a great fundamental article of the Gospel, that that same blessed Lord, who ascended from Mount Olivet, and is now at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, shall come from thence to judge the quick

and the dead, and to stand again on that very summit from which he went up. This is true, as Christ himself is true; and “he that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.” Amen.

“He cometh *with the clouds*.” Here is the great characteristic in the manner of his coming. “*With the clouds*,” that is, in majesty and glory;—with the awful pomp and splendor of Him “who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind.”

“*And every eye shall see him*.” Here is the publicity of the sublime event. It is not said that all shall see him at the same time, or in the same scene, or with the same feelings. Other passages teach us that some eyes will see him whilst he is yet to others invisible; and that he will be manifested to some at one time and place, and to others at other times and places, and in different acts of the wonderful drama. But, somewhere, at some time, in some stage of his judicial administrations, there never has been and never will be that human being who shall not see him. To every one that has lived, and to every one who shall live, he will show himself, and compel every eye to meet his eye. The dead shall be brought to life again, and shall see him, and the living shall see him. The good shall see him, and the wicked shall see him. Some shall see him and shout: “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation;” and others shall see him and cry to “the mountains

and rocks: Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

*"And they which pierced him."* Though his manifestation shall be absolutely universal, it has an awful distinction with reference to some. Of all beings who shall then wish to be saved that sight will be those who murdered him. But they shall not escape it. They must each and all some day confront him, and meet his all-penetrating gaze. From the wretched man who betrayed him, down to the soldier who pierced his side, and all who have made common cause with them in wronging, persecuting, wounding and insulting that meek Lamb of God, shall then be compelled to face his judgment-seat, and to look upon him whom they have pierced.

*"And all the tribes of the land shall mourn about him."* Is not this a special word for the Jews? Is it not an allusion to a wail of penitence which shall be elicited from long apostate Israel, when they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and doubt of his messiahship no more? Does it not refer to the fulfilment of Zechariah 12:10, where the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one is in bitterness for his first-born? Oh, the intensity of that bitterness! Brethren, I do not wonder that worldlings and half-Christians have no love for this doctrine, or that they hate

to hear about Christ's speedy coming. It is the deathknell of their gayeties and pleasures—the turning of their confidence to consternation—the conversion of their songs to shrieks of horror and despair. There is a day coming, when “the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be made low;” when there shall be “upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity;” when “all the tribes of the earth shall mourn;” when men shall “go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth,” “into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty;” when men “shall seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.” And that day is the day of Christ's coming, and those dismayed ones are such as love not his appearing. Fear and dread shall fall upon the wicked; trouble and anguish shall make them afraid; and men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth. The saints will then have been caught away to their Lord. From the same field, the same shop, the same bed, one shall have been taken and the other left. And on those remaining ones, who had not watched, neither kept their garments, nor made themselves ready, shall the terrors of judgment fall, and not a family or tribe of all that live shall escape.

“*Even so, Amen.*” Some take this as the seal and ratification of the solemn truths which have

just been uttered. If this be the true meaning, what particular stress is to be laid upon these things—how sure to come to pass—how unmis-takably certain! Brethren, it does seem to me, when I look at the Scriptures on this subject, that even the best of us are not half awake. May God arouse us by his Spirit, and not permit us to sleep till the thunders and terrors of the great day are upon us! But I find another and more natural sense of these words. I find in them John's acquiescence in all that the great day is to bring, and his prayer, as repeated at the end of the book, that the Lord would hasten its coming. Terrible as it will be to the wicked, and the unprepared, and those who refuse the warnings which we give them, it is a precious day to the saints, a day to be coveted, and to be prayed for with all earnestness of desire. The poor faint-hearted Christianity of our times can hardly contemplate it without trembling and annoyance. Many who profess and call themselves Christians would rather not hear about it, and would prefer, if they had their choice, that Christ might never come. It was not so in the days of Christianity's pristine vigor. Then the anxious inquiry of disciples was, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Then Christians wrote to each other in joyous congratulation, that their citizenship was in heaven, whence they looked for the coming of the Saviour; and comforted one another in the

assurance that the Lord himself is to descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ; and, as directed by their Lord, lifted up their heads, and looked up with joyful hope at every turn in human affairs which they could by any means construe into a probable herald of his nearing epiphany. Then the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come," had a depth of meaning and lively anticipation which now has well-nigh been lost. Then "the appearing of Jesus Christ" had a power over the soul which made it "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" and the most earnest and constant call of apostles and their followers was, "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. Even so. Amen." Nor can the Church ever be her true self, or enter into the true spirit of her faith, or rise to the true sublimity of her hope, where this is not the highest object of her deepest desire. For how, indeed, can we regard ourselves as rightly planted upon the apostolic foundation, if we cannot join with heart and soul in this apostolic prayer?

IV. To all this, the apostle yet adds a most devout reference to Christ, and to Christ's declaration concerning himself, the further to confirm the solemn truthfulness of his words, and to incite us to lay the more stress upon them.

Great things, and, to human reason, very improbable things, were upon his mind, and about to be submitted to the Churches. Their importance, and the predisposition on the part of men to



disregard them, seemed to call for some especial pledge of the likelihood and certainty of their accomplishment. And that pledge he gives by devoutly referring everything to that omniscient, eternal and almighty Being, whose Apocalypse he was commissioned to describe. He invokes the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending,—He who was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty,—as his judge in these utterances, to whom also he leaves the fulfilment of all that had been given him to write. It was as much as to say, if this was not a faithful and honest declaration of his inmost feelings and belief, and a true account of what he had seen and heard, such is the majesty of the Being who is to deal with him for it; and that, if there be any unlikelihoods in these things, such is the character of Him from whom he has received them, and to whom he refers for the power to make good his words.

And how sublime is the majesty of our blessed Redeemer as thus set forth! Never before had he given such an account of himself. He had intimated as much, and permitted his apostles to use language which implied the same. But never till in this Apocalypse had he formally assumed to himself such Divine majesty. He here proclaims Himself to be The Almighty, the very God, the One existing before anything was made, comprehending all things in His own existence, and possessing immensity and eternity. Look a moment at the particulars.

*“I am Alpha and Omega.”* These are the names

of the letters which begin and end the Greek alphabet. It is the same as if it were said in English, "I am A and Z." That is, our Saviour claims to be what letters and language were meant to be, namely the expression of truth. He is THE WORD—the embodiment of all Divine verities from first to last. God is a Spirit—an invisible, incorporeal, intangible, unapproachable Spirit. But that hidden and unsearchable Mind may be expressed, may let itself forth in comprehensible utterance. And that expression, that utterance of invisible Godhead is Jesus Christ—the Divine Wisdom—the only communication from the absolute to the created.

*"The beginning and the ending."* This is not found in some of the oldest and best copies of this book. It was, perhaps, introduced merely as an explanation of the clause going before it. It does not seem to convey any additional thought. He is the first, because all things took their beginning from him; and he is the last, because in him shall all things have their consummation. But what follows is unmistakably genuine.

*"Who is, and who was, and who is to come."* This sublime form of speech is used to describe the Eternal Father; but it belongs equally to the Son. He is the I AM, whose being is the same through all reckonings of time. As the Father exists in all the past, present, and future, eternal and unchangeable; so Christ, who is the express image of the Father, is "the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever." He was with the Father

before the world was. He is now at the right hand of the Father. And he is to come in the name and the glory of the Father in those eternal administrations which are the joy and hope of his people.

“*The Almighty.*” Than this there is no higher name. It declares the complete and unqualified subjection of all created things to our Lord Jesus Christ. It leaves nothing which is not put under Him. Oh, the adorableness and majesty of our Redeemer! Who could play false in such a presence? What son of Belial may escape righteous retribution in such hands? What untruthfulness can there be in such a Being? What lack for the full performance of all the will and purpose of One with such characteristics! Rather than give way to doubt and unbelief, let us fall down in lowly adoration at his feet, take His truth, and rejoice in Him as our hope and our everlasting consolation.

But, I must conclude these observations for the present. The Apostolic prelude to this solemn book is sufficiently before us to be made of great spiritual profit. Let us see to it that we do not fail to realize that advantage which it is intended and so well fitted to impart. Here is grace and peace from the Triune God spoken for our acceptance; let us see to it that we do not receive the inspired salutation in vain. Here is a glorious celebration of an accomplished absolution, an existing love, and sublime endowments, all made ours in Christ Jesus; let us make sure that our hearts

are in tune to the same lofty song. Here is an apostolic admonition to direct our most earnest thoughts to the personal return of our Lord, which is to be so dreadful to the unready and so joyous to them that watch and pray; let us make it our business to be properly exercised in that "Behold." Here also we are referred to the ineffable greatness and Divinity of our Redeemer and Judge; and let us beware how we trifle with his word, question his power, or dash ourselves against his Almightyness.

And "unto Him that loves us, and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom—priests unto Him who is his God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen."

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## LECTURE THIRD.

THE APOCALYPSE PROPER—FIRST SCENE—JOHN—THE BROTHERHOOD OF BELIEVERS—CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CONFESSION—PATMOS—THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH—CHRISTIAN FREEDOM—THE GREAT VOICE—THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS—THE SON OF MAN—HIS CHARACTER IN THIS VISION—DETAILS OF THE DESCRIPTION—MAGNIFICENCE OF THE PICTURE—EFFECT OF IT—DREAD OF THE SPIRITUAL—COMFORTING ASSURANCE OF CHRIST.

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REV. CHAP. 1: 9-17. (Revised Text.)—I, John, your brother and copartner in the tribulation, and the kingdom, and the patient waiting, in Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. I became in Spirit in the Lord's day; and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, ["I am Alpha and Omega," &c., is here without due authority] What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven Churches: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

And I turned about to see the voice that was speaking with me, and, being turned, I saw seven candlesticks [lampstands or lamps] of gold; and in the midst of the candlesticks [one] like to the Son of man, clothed in a long garment reaching to the feet, and girt at the breasts with a girdle of gold. His head and his hairs [were] white, as white wool, as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass glowing with fire as in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters; and proceeding out of his mouth a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not.

WE now approach the Apocalypse proper. Hitherto we have only been considering superscriptions and prefaces. Henceforward we have to deal with the thing itself.

Those acquainted with the contents of this remarkable book are aware, that it is made up of several distinct scenes or acts. The first gives us the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to his Churches on earth, and his judgment of them. The second gives us the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to the Church in heaven, or his glorified Church, and the scenes into which the saints are introduced after they are caught up from the earth. The third gives us the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to the world, and his administrations of retribution to the nations. And so on, till we see everything settled in the excellencies of the new heavens and the new earth. We have to do now only with the first, which extends to the close of the third chapter. It consists of two leading parts: first, a magnificent vision of the Saviour, with some circumstantial particulars and explanations; and second, seven epistles, descriptive of character, and how it fares in the solemn judgment. It is the first part of this first act that I propose now to consider; that is, THE VISION.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF IT;

II. THE SUBJECT AND SUBSTANCE OF IT;

III. THE RESULTS OF IT.

Lift up your hearts, then, unto the Lord, the giver of light and grace, that He may enable us rightly to conceive of these important matters.

The seer of this vision was *John*. At the time of the vision, he was the only remaining apostle, and perhaps the only survivor of those with whom Christ had personally conversed. He was therefore the most interesting and exalted Christian then living upon the earth—a most reverend and venerable man.

But he was as humble and meek as he was high in place. He gives himself no titles. He says nothing of his sublime official relations. It was enough for him to put himself on a level with the common brotherhood of believers. Whatever may be our gifts and stations, we are all one in Christ Jesus. The high and the low, the rich and poor, the bond and free, those who have known the Saviour after the flesh, and those who have seen him only with the eye of faith, are all brethren together, children of one Father, servants of the same Lord, and fellow-heirs to the same hopes and inheritance. He was the inspired teacher of those to whom he was writing. His words were to be to them a rule of faith and life. But, with all, he calls himself simply their “*brother*, and co-partner in tribulation, and in the kingdom, and in the patient waiting, in Christ Jesus.”

And in this statement he brings out what were the chief characteristics of the Christian confession in those days; namely, a common brotherhood in Christ, a common suffering for Christ, a common royalty and kingship as yet unrevealed, and a common hopeful and patient waiting for the time of blessed coronation, and joyous entrance with



the Lord upon the dominion of the world. The same may serve to show in how far our Christianity answers to the Christianity of the Apostles' days, and to assure us that, in so far as these characteristics appear in us, we are the brethren of Apostles, and partakers in the same fellowship with those who saw the miracles, heard the words, and waited about the steps of Him who now reigns in the highest heavens, and are also to reign with Him forever and ever.

John was at the time in exile, upon a lonely and desolate island. But neither seas, nor Alps, nor ages, can sever the bonds by which Christians are united to each other, or to Christ, their Lord. Less than a year ago I passed that island. It is a mere mass of barren rocks, dark in color and cheerless in form. It lies out in the open sea, near the coast of Western Asia Minor. It has neither trees nor rivers, nor any land for cultivation, except some little nooks between the ledges of rocks. There is still a dingy grotto remaining, in which the aged Apostle is said to have lived, and in which he is said to have had this vision. A chapel covers it, hung with lamps kept burning by the monks. He had been banished to this inhospitable place by the persecuting Roman government, not for crimes, but "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." He was the acknowledged head of the witnesses of Jesus, and the great promulgator and defender of the truth as it is in Jesus, and for his zeal and prominence in this, he was dealt with as a felon and an

outlaw. The unconverted heart always has been, is now, and always will be, at enmity with God, and hence at disagreement with God's truth and people. It cannot endure what is not conformed to its views and tastes, and is full of malice, resentment, and revenge towards everything which holds with God and with Christ. And if the world is at any time at peace, and on good terms with the Church, it is because the Church itself has become debauched, and has descended to a compromise to be at one with the wicked. - The nominal Christian and the formalist the world cannot hate, for they are of it, and it will love its own; but the Johns and Pauls must go into banishment, or give their necks to the stateblock.

But the wrath of the wicked does but bring saints the nearer to the choicest favors of God. The Patmos of persecuting Rome is to John the door of sublimest communion with heaven. The chains of resentful power may confine the body, but they cannot bind the soul. The Apostle, doomed to the isle of convicts, soars on the wings of prophetic ecstasy, traverses ages, and moves among the most stupendous administrations of the last day. Circumscribed in his natural life, he is lifted to a higher life. Shut out from this world, and estranged from earthly friends, he becomes conversant with one of spiritual realities, and is made to communicate with celestial orders. In solitude secluded, if not in some dungeon immured, he is thrilled with visions and revelations of the Lord, "whose overpowering splendor that

he might endure, whose great variety that he might remember and record, whose various places of representation that he might be transported to," the very conditions of his existence are transformed, as in the case of Ezekiel on Chebar's banks, and as in the case of Paul caught up to Paradise, and hearing unspeakable words, not knowing whether he was in the body or out of the body. In a word, he was (*εν πνευματι*) IN SPIRIT—in a condition wholly loosened from the earth—transported by means of the Spirit,—(*εν τη κυριαζῇ ἡμερα*) INTO THE LORD'S DAY—stationed as a spectator amid the very scenes of the great judgment itself.\*

In this state of prophetic exaltation, the first thing that arrested the Apostle's attention was, "*a great voice as of a trumpet.*" When God revealed himself on Mount Sinai, he broke silence with the "voice of a trumpet, exceeding loud." When the service of the temple began in the morning, and the great door was opened, it was at the sound of the trumpet. When the year of Jubilee came round, it was ushered in by the sounding of the silver trumpet. And so when the silence of the tomb is to be broken, and the scattered children of God gathered for their rewards, it shall be with "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God:" "for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." And whilst the sound-

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\* See First Discourse, pp. 20, 21.

ing of the great trumpet in this case was intended to fix the attention of the seer, and assure him of the Divinity of the Speaker and of the importance of what was to follow, and to give him his commission with reference to this whole Apocalypse, I cannot disconnect it from the sounding of that very trump by which the blessed Lord, in the great day, will arouse, and call together his scattered saints, and announce to them their everlasting Jubilee. It summoned the Apostle, and it summons us, to the contemplation of the fact, that the great Apocalypse of our Saviour is to be preceded with the sound of "a great voice as of a trumpet." The godless world may not hear that voice; but Apostles shall hear it; and all who have place with them in the blessed brotherhood of suffering and patient waiting for Christ, whom John here represents, shall hear it; and they shall be transfigured when they hear it; and mount up with wings like eagles to the open presence of their Lord.

The instant John turned to "see the voice that spake with" him, he "saw seven golden candlesticks (or lampstands), and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like to the Son of man." From the conclusion of the chapter, we learn that these "seven candlesticks are the seven Churches." In all languages, truth and knowledge are likened to light. The Psalmist speaks of God's word as a lamp to his feet and a light unto his path. And so the Churches are the lampstands, or light-bearers. They have no light in them-

selves, but they hold forth and diffuse the light which they have from the oil of grace and the fire of the Spirit. Each Christian is a lighted candle. And all God's children are described as "lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." It is therefore a most significant image by which the communities of saints are here set forth. They are as so many lampstands of God's light and truth in a world of darkness; and as such Christ deals with them.

These lampstands are *gold*—composed of the costliest, the most precious, the most glorious, the royal, the *sacred* metal. A saint is an excellent, a glorious, a royal, in some sense a sacred being; and a congregation of Christians is altogether the most precious thing on earth. It is the pure gold of the world.

*Seven* is the number of completeness. It here designates the whole Christian body, of all times and all places.

The "one like unto the Son of man," is Christ himself. He is described in the same way in the Psalms, in the visions of Daniel, and in his own discourses concerning himself. It is a form of speech meant to set forth the essential importance and prominence of the human element of the Saviour's character; for it is in his human nature that his redemption work is conducted, and his victories achieved. It is as the Son of man that he came, lived, suffered and died. It was as the Son of man that he rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come again, judge the world,

and set up his glorious everlasting rule. But he is not to be conceived of as nothing but a man. He is "one *like* unto the Son of man." This word *like* sets us upon the scent of something higher than humanity, though conditioned as humanity, and having everything in common with it. Thus we read of him as "made in the likeness of men,"—"in all respects made like unto his brethren." This assumption of likeness to man, presupposes some modification of what properly is not human. And so we also read of him as The Word made flesh—God manifested in the flesh—the Son of God condescending to be the Son of man,—not in appearance only, but in literal reality; not for certain acts of humiliation only, but for glory and dominion as well; not temporarily only, till a few facts are accomplished, then to return to what he was before the marvellous process began, but forever,—as well throughout the unending duration of the results achieved as in the immediate mysteries of the passion which laid the foundation of these results. It is a mischievous error to suppose that the Son of God's assumption of human nature was only for the immediate private end of redeeming fallen man—a mere phenomenon in Godhead's ever busy administration—a simple act the like of which may have been before, or may be again. It is the abiding miracle of eternity. It is, and was meant to be, a thing of abiding permanence, the eternal continuity of which is as vital to the everlasting future of the redeemed, and the great purposes of God, as the continuity



of creative power is to the preservation of the universe. To deny this, is to strip the Gospel of its chief glory, and to start on a path of heretical peril almost sure to end in utter shipwreck of the faith. Christ is "one like unto the Son of man," that is Godhead embodied in humanity, not only for what has transpired in the past, or is going on at present, or is to be enacted at the judgment, but also for the whole eternity of administrations appertaining to the saints, and to the race. And this Divine man is the great subject of this vision, especially in his relation to the Churches. John beholds him "in the midst of the seven candlesticks," and "the seven candlesticks are the seven Churches."

Some have given out that it is simply in his character of *Priest*, that the Saviour appears in this vision. He is indeed a priest, even our great High Priest that has passed into the heavens; but this is not his only character, nor expressive of his entire relation to the Churches. Neither is it the only or even the chief aspect in which he comes before us in this vision. There is no mitre, no ephod, no breastplate, no censer, no blood. The garment reaching down to the feet is as distinctive of royal dignity as of sacerdotal functions, if not more so. The girdle might appear to be priestly; but it is *gold*, all gold, indicative of royalty; whilst the proper priestly girdle was not gold, but simply wrought and interwoven with gold. He also wields a sword, which is another mark of sovereignty and judicial power, which does not belong to the



sacerdotal office, albeit that sword proceeds from his mouth. This ought to satisfy us that the character which Christ bears in this vision is something more than a Priest. There is royalty and magistracy, as well as priesthood. We here have to do with the Lord and Judge of the Churches. The throne is yet in the background, but the royal majesty is manifest. As Judge of the world, more is to be shown hereafter; but here he appears as Judge of the Churches. He is a Priest, but a Priest invested with royal prerogatives, and come forth to pronounce judgment upon the candlesticks which he attends. In a word, as this vision, and the epistles which follow it, have respect to the entire Church from the days of the Apostle on to the resurrection, grasped in a single view, so it is Christ's whole relation to that Church, with special reference to his judgment of it, that is here presented to our contemplation.

Behold, then, O man, thy Lord and Judge.

1. He is "*in the midst of the seven candlesticks.*" When he left the world, he said to his disciples, "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And lest the promise should be mistaken as belonging to ministers alone, he gave the still further assurance, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is, in the midst of them. I cannot explain to you the method of this presence. Even in things with which we are familiar, there is mystery attaching to what we call *presence*. We speak of a man as present in a room, and of what transpires in that

room as taking place in his presence. But how is he present beyond the immediate space occupied by his body? That his presence extends beyond the few feet marked by the outlines of his physical frame, is a fact which we all feel and realize; but how it is so, we cannot so easily explain. I am present in this audience-chamber. I am as much present to those in the remotest pews, as to those who are in the nearest. And yet, my body is present only in these few feet within the pulpit. Suppose, then, you were to conceive of me as suddenly exalted into a majesty and glory like that of Jesus. Imagine these walls widened out in corresponding proportion. Fancy everything now on the scale of the earthly and human expanded to the scale of the heavenly and glorified. And it may aid you somewhat in conceiving how Christ can be present with all his Churches, and yet occupy a definite space in heaven. The whole world is not as great to him as an ordinary room to us. And if my presence can fill this Church, whilst I keep my place in this pulpit, his presence can certainly fill all his Churches, even from his mysterious celestial location at the right hand of the Father. This, however, is certain, that he is, in some sort, in all his Churches. There is not a member which he does not see and know. There is not a Christian service held, of which we are not authorized to say, The Lord is there. He is in his Churches, not only by his word, by his sacraments, by his ministers, by his authority, power and Spirit; but he is there himself, as the Son of

man. He is present as Priest, as Lord, as Judge; and hence in his own proper person, as the God-man. There is another, nearer, and more manifest presence, to be realized when he shall come again; but not more true or real than that by which he is even now in the midst of us. Were these dull, dim senses of ours but unlocked and energized, after the style of that transformation for which the saints are taught to look, we would see our Saviour, present to-night, as really as John saw him "walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." It is a solemn and startling thought; but it is true.

2. "*Clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girt at the breasts with a girdle of gold.*" In former times, and to this day in some sections of the world, the long trailing robe is the token of dignity and honor. Thus, in Isaiah's vision of the Lord upon his throne, he speaks of just such a robe, the train or skirts of which filled the temple. Righteousness is indicated by a garment. The priestly dignity was marked by a robe of this kind, though somewhat shorter, and hung around the skirt with pomegranates and bells. The high officer who drew the marks of distinction in Ezekiel's vision of the great slaughter was also similarly attired. One of those mighty personages with whom Daniel dealt in his heavenly visions was clad in this way, and also girded with gold, though about his *loins*, indicative of service, and not about *the breasts*, as indicative of privilege and superior dignity. If, then, we are to take this attire of the

Son of man as symbolical, as commentators generally have taken it, it must describe personal qualities, official dignity, and celestial majesty, at which we may well bow down in the deepest reverence.

But why not also take it literally? There is no such thing as nakedness in heaven. Clothing and raiment enter into all the descriptions we have of the saints in glory. They have robes, they have crowns, they have wedding-garments. Christ is not naked; and when we see him, it will not be in a state of divesture and nudity. He has his appropriate clothing for every scene of his grand administrations. And when we have this minute account of his attire, why should we strive to explain it away as mere figure and symbol? Was it not the literal Son of man whom John saw? Did he not have explained to him what was mystical, leaving this to be taken just as it was seen? For my own part, I believe that our blessed Lord is at this moment arrayed just as he is here described, and that this is the dress in which he will deal with the Churches, and be seen of the saints, when the judgment begins. But everything outward in heaven is in exact correspondence with the inward. Official robes are confined to official dignities, and whatever the attire of Christ indicates, that he is. Everything there is reality. The garments are real, and that with which they connect is real. There will be no cloak there for unrighteousness, and no saints in tatters, or kings in rags, or plebeians in royal array. All

are in dress what they are in reality. Christ in the priestly robe, is a priest;—in the royal dress, is a king;—in judicial attire, is a judge. And in the words before us, we have all these dignities in one, and each contributing to express the sublime power, majesty and glory of that great Lord and Saviour with whom we have to do.

3. And *“his head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.”* The Scriptures tell us, that *“the hoary head is a crown of glory.”* The same appears in Daniel’s vision of *“The Ancient of Days, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.”* Many have taken these white hairs as symbolic of the Godhead of Christ. Pure, undistributed light certainly is the representative of Deity. Paul also says, *“The head of Christ is God.”* White hairs connect with fatherhood, and patriarchal dignity; and *“with the ancient is wisdom.”* But I take this peculiarity as I take the robe and the golden girdle. It belongs to the glory and beauty in which our Lord now appears, and will appear to his saints, when he shall call them to himself. It connects indeed with his eternal Deity, but also with his human majesty, and the sublime reverence that appertains to him as a man. He is the everlasting Father, as well as the Prince of Peace. He is the second Adam, with all the patriarchal honor and dignity which would by this time attach to the first, if he had never sinned.

4. *“And his eyes were as a flame of fire.”* Here is intelligence; burning, all-penetrating intelli-

gence. Here is power to read secrets, to bring hidden things to light, to warm and search all hearts at a single glance. And all this is expressed in the very aspect of our Lord. It is given as one of the marks of Cæsar's greatness, that he had fiery eyes—a penetrating, warming, revealing glance—a look which enemies and dissemblers could not stand. Christ is the sublime and the almighty Cæsar of the Church. He trieth the hearts and reins. "His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." The light of the human eye is from without, and shifts its focal point as the rays happen to fall on it; but the light in the eye of Christ is from the Divinity within, and streams forth with steady and all-penetrating sharpness, as well in the darkness as in the day, into the soul as well as upon the body. But his sharp look is one of inspiring warmth to the good, as well as of discomfiting and consuming terror to the hypocritical and the godless. Will you believe it, my friends, that this is the look which is upon you, and which is to try you in the great day! Well may we pray the prayer of David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

5. "*And his feet [were] like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.*" He once said, through



Isaiah, "I will make the place of my feet glorious." But here we have the feet themselves, those feet with which he is to tread down the wicked; and the description corresponds with the rest of the picture. Christ is all-glorious, even to his feet. They are like *glowing brass*—like brass in the fire heated unto whiteness. The glory of this metal, in such a state, is almost insufferable to the human gaze. It presents an image of pureness which is terrible. And it is upon these feet of dreadful holiness that our Lord walks among the Churches, and shall tread down all abominations, and crush Antichrist, and Satan, and all who unhappily set aside his authority and his claims. Beautiful are those feet to them that love him, but terrible and consuming to those who shall be trodden by them.

6. "*And his voice as the sound of many waters.*" How could it be otherwise, considering how he is speaking and uttering himself throughout all his Churches, and all the world, from the beginning until now, and on to the day of his coming? Or, leaving this out of the question, how could it be otherwise, considering that the day is approaching when "all that are in the graves shall hear *the voice* of the Son of man, and they that hear shall live?" But this majesty and power of voice is elsewhere more especially referred to the dreadful-ness of Christ toward his faithless servants and enemies. It is particularly characteristic of his rebukes. His word came to Jeremiah, saying, "Say unto them, The Lord shall roar from on high,



and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth, for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations; he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord." But whether for the overthrow of his enemies or the salvation of his people, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty." It scattereth the proud, and it giveth joy and confidence to the lowly.

7. "*And he had in his right hand seven stars.*" "The seven stars are the angels (ministers) of the seven Churches," and, as such, they are distinct from the candlesticks. Christ walks among the candlesticks, but he holds these ministers in his right hand. The democratic idea of Church organization, which makes all power proceed from the members, and makes the ministerial position nothing more than what inheres in every Christian, is thus scattered to the winds. Ministers have relations to Christ and to the Church, which ordinary Church members have not. They partake directly of Christ's authority, and are responsible directly to him, and are upheld by his right hand, beyond the power of men or angels to displace them. What a lesson for ministers, as to the holiness of their office, the solemnity of their responsibilities, the necessity of unswerving fidelity, and the exercise of every confidence in their

sacred functions. They are in Christ's hand. If they are unfaithful none can deliver them out of that hand; but if true to their position, none can touch them, or quench their light. They shall shine as the stars forever and ever. What a lesson for the people as to the authority of those ministrations which they are so prone to despise. Dealing with the regular ministers of the Churches, you are dealing with the jewels on Christ's right hand. And what a lesson for all as to the Divine majesty and glory of our Lord! The Pauls, and Johns, and Husses, and Luthers, and Cranmers, and Knoxes, and Wesleys, and all the hosts of those who have been teaching and guiding the Churches for these 1800 years, are no more than the rings upon his fingers. But they are jewels to him. He holds them as precious. Disregarded as they may be of men, they are dear to him. He holds them, as a man holds what he most esteems. He holds them, for service now, and for judgment when he cometh. He holds them, for success against the hosts of evil, for glorious honor if they are faithful, and for eternal disgrace if they are not.

8. "*And out of his mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword.*" The sword is the symbol of magistracy and judgment. But this is not a *hand-sword*, but a *word-sword*. Nevertheless, it accords exactly with what Christ has himself said. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Even

now the word of Christ is all the while absolving, or binding under condemnation, every one to whom it is preached. A certain judicial process inheres in every faithful presentation of the Gospel. It is good news—glad tidings; but there is a sword in it; a sword of double edge; and that a sword of judgment. And all the solemn administrations of the last day are nothing more than the full revelation of this sword-power of Christ's word, cutting asunder the unfaithful servant, and carrying into effect what is now already spoken. The word of God is not an empty utterance. It is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." And this potency pertains to the matter of punishment, as well as to the matter of conviction. In the beginning, God spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The word was potent. And so in the Gospel and the final summing up of this word of Christ. It will carry its own sharp execution into the Church and into the world, into the heavens and into the earth. "By the word of God the heavens were of old, . . . but the heavens and the earth which are now *by the same word* are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." It is that word which is described as the instrument of punishment to the impenitent in Pergamos, and to the hosts of the mighty ones whom the great day is to overwhelm in the winepress of the Almighty's

wrath. And it is that same word which is the sword that shall be bathed in heaven, when its powers shall be shaken, and its hosts fall. Oh, the majesty of Jesus, and the fearfulness of his judgments! Vengeance is his; and he will repay.

9. "*And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" The Churches are *lamps*; the ministers are *stars*; but Christ is the *sun*. He is to the moral world what the sun is to the natural. But let us not consider the description exhausted by its spiritual significations. Christ has a literal face; and that face must have a form and expression. He is not a fiction, but a reality—not a spirit, but a man, with all the features of a man, though it be in a glorified condition. He has a countenance, and that countenance is "*as the sun shineth in his strength.*" Something of this was seen in the mount of transfiguration, when "*his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*" Something of the same was manifest when he appeared to Saul of Tarsus in "*a light above the brightness of the sun.*" And so glorious and pervading is this light which issues from his face, that in the New Jerusalem there will be neither sun, nor moon, nor lamp, nor any other light, and yet rendered so luminous by his presence, that even the nations on the earth walk in the light of it. And so the lightning brilliancy, which is to flash from one end of heaven to the other at the time of his coming, and the glory which is then to invest him and the whole firma-

ment, is simply the uncovering or revelation of that blessed light which streams from his sublime person.

Such, then, is the full-drawn picture of our glorious Lord, as he walks among his Churches, and proceeds to pass his solemn judgment upon them. There have not been wanting some to pronounce it grotesque and intolerable. But I cannot so regard it. If a sublimer conception of Divine and glorified humanity, so true to the Saviour's offices and work, ever entered into the imagination of man, I have never seen it, and never heard of it. And when I recall the magnificent portraiture, the human form, walking majestically amid golden furniture, clothed with the garment of royalty, girded with gold, crowned with flowing locks that reflect the light and purity of heaven, having a glance of electric power, feet glowing with the liquid splendor of melted brass, a voice of majesty at which the earth and the heavens shake, the right hand lit with starry jewels, a mouth whose words carry their own execution in them, and a countenance as glorious as the noonday sun;—when I survey such majestic lineaments, and such mighty powers, and hear the possessor of them say: “I am the First and the Last, and THE LIVING ONE; and I was dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever: and I have the keys of death and of hades;”—I say, when I bring all this before me, and try to realize it in my imagination, I am almost overwhelmed with the sublimity of the picture, and with the goodness, and grace, and

power, and might with which the eternal Father hath invested the person of Jesus Christ. In the Gospels even, I see him mostly as a man of sorrows, persecuted unto death, and laid in the grave, though raised again in vindication of his righteous goodness. But here I see him lifted up to the right hand of power, and clothed with all majesty, that creation's knees might bow at his feet, and creation's tongues confess his greatness and proclaim his praise. Here I see Godhead in manhood, unhumbled and unalloyed by the union; and humanity transformed and exalted to the sphere of the worshipful and Divine; and all, to give greatness to the lowly, and strength to the feeble, and honor to the despised; and to bring the lofty neck to obedience, tear away the masks of falsehood, and enforce the rule of heaven on the earth. I do not wonder at the effect the vision produced upon the exiled apostle as it burst upon him in his lonely solitude.

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.” Had it not been that he was in the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit, it were hardly too much to suppose that it would have extinguished his life altogether. There is an awe and terror of a spiritual appearance which is indescribable. Job's friend says that when he saw a Spirit, the hair of his flesh stood up. Daniel, who feared not the wrath of a king, nor the lions' den, when he saw the vision, was left without strength in him. So also Ezekiel, and Isaiah, and others of whom we read. God has inwrought into our nature a com-



mon reverence for a spiritual world. And there is something fearfully prophetic in these irrepres-sible instincts. They not only argue the existence of a spiritual world, and that we have deep, mysterious and awful connections with it, but also that the veil which covers it is very thin, and destined some day to be withdrawn; and that its withdrawal connects with realities which sinful humanity well may dread.

And if John was so overwhelmed with this vision of the Saviour, on whose bosom he leaned, and with whose power he was so familiar, how will it be with those who know him not, how will it be with us, when the startling trump of God shall make these heavens ring with the tidings of that great Saviour's presence, and these eyes of ours shall meet his eyes, and see him in his glory? Will there be no fainting, falling, swooning, then? Will there be no sinking in the souls of men, no drying up, as it were, of the very fountains of life at the stupendous Apocalypse? Do I not hear the anxious inquiry started in many a heart at the mere thought of it: Alas, alas, how can I behold it and live? But a single utterance made it all right with John; and with that, if you be indeed a Christian, I would have you comfort yourself in view of that awful moment. Jesus said, "*Fear not.*"

Great and dreadful was the glory, and power, and wonder, and majesty which had suddenly opened upon the seer. The trumpet sound, the scene of splendor, the all-revealing look, the voice



of power, the countenance of blazing light, all commingling, were enough to undo humanity. But the word was *Fear not*. Still more awful scenes were coming. The Churches were to be sifted, the saints were to be crowned, the seals of judgment were to be opened, the days of vengeance were to be revealed, the sun was to be darkened, the moon to be turned to blood, the stars to fall, the hills to be overthrown, the islands to be shaken out of their places, the pit to be opened, the hordes of hell to overrun the apostate nations, the angels to shout from the sky, the martyrs to cry from under the altar, unprecedented plagues to overwhelm the world, the battle of the great day of God Almighty to be fought, the winepress of the wrath of God to be trodden, the places of the wicked to be swept with the besom of destruction, and the fowls to be called together unto the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of kings, and of captains, and of mighty men, and of multitudes of small and great. But the word was *Fear not*. Thrones were to be set, the dead were to be raised, the heavens and the earth were to be changed, death and hell were to be summoned up for destruction, a city was to come down from God out of heaven, and wonders of power and glory were to be enacted as at the going forth of the words which spoke creation into being. But the word was *Fear not*.

The true Christian is forever safe. If you be in the Spirit, and the Spirit be in you, the life that would otherwise fail you will not fail; the

fear that would otherwise overwhelm you shall not overwhelm you. In your weakness, Christ will give you strength. In your terror, Christ will be your consolation. In your wild wonderment, his hand will touch, and his gracious words assure you. Only see to it that you are on right terms with him—that you are one of his true people—that you are a brother of John, and a co-partner in the kingdom, and in patient waiting, in Christ Jesus. Having this, you have secured your armor against all the terrors of the Apocalypse. Let us, then, devoutly join in the prayer—

Draw near, O Son of God, draw near,  
Us with thy flaming eye behold;  
Still in thy church vouchsafe to appear,  
And let our candlestick be gold.

Still hold the stars in thy right hand,  
And let them in thy lustre glow,  
The lights of a benighted land,  
The angels of thy church below.

Make good their apostolic boast,  
Their high commission let them prove,  
Be temples of the Holy Ghost,  
And filled with faith, and hope, and love.

Give them an ear to hear thy word;  
Thou speakest to the Churches now:  
And let all tongues confess their Lord,  
Let every knee to Jesus bow.

## LECTURE FOURTH.

THE VISION SUPPLEMENTED WITH DECLARATIONS—CHRIST THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE LIVING ONE, DIED, IS ALIVE, HAS THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HADES—WHAT HE COMMANDED JOHN TO WRITE—THE KEY TO THE ANALYSIS OF THIS BOOK—THE HISTORIC INTERPRETATION—THE MYSTERY OF THE STARS AND CANDLESTICKS—THE WORLD IN WHICH THEY ARE STATIONED.

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REV. 1 : 17-20. (Revised Text.)—I am the first and the last, and THE LIVING ONE ; and I became dead, and behold, I am living for the ages of the ages ; and I have the keys of death and of hades. Write therefore what thou sawest, and what they are, and what shall come to pass after these things ; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest upon my right hand, and of the seven candlesticks of gold. The seven stars are [the] angels of the seven Churches, and the seven candlesticks are [the] seven Churches.

**T**HERE is much of glory and majesty in Christ which cannot be pictured to the eye. Hence the vision which John had of him is supplemented with titles and descriptions, the further to assure his faith, and to deepen our apprehension of the true nature and sublimity of our great Lord and Judge. Our business this evening will be,

I. TO TAKE A BRIEF SURVEY OF THESE SUPPLEMENTARY DECLARATIONS ;

II. TO LOOK AT THE DIVINE COMMAND UNDER WHICH THE WRITING OF THE APOCALYPSE WAS ORDERED ;

III. TO INQUIRE A LITTLE MORE DEFINITELY INTO THE MYSTERY WHICH JOHN WAS DIRECTED TO EXPLAIN.

“*I am the First and the Last.*” This is a form of speech often employed by the Almighty, when about to comfort his people, and to assure their faith. We find it three times in Isaiah, and three times in the Apocalypse; and in every instance used for a like purpose. Its meaning is hardly to be mistaken; and yet it has been mistaken, by some who wished to avoid the doctrine which it teaches, and by others who did not sufficiently weigh it in all its connections. These take it as if the Saviour had said: “I am He who, being the foremost and first in all honor, became the lowest and last in dishonor, sounding the lowest depths of ignominy and shame.” That this is true of Christ may readily be admitted. He was, as Artemonius says, “the most excellent, and the most abject.” But this is not the truth meant to be expressed in this formula. It does not fall in with the course of thought, or the end for which it is introduced, in this or in any other connection in which it is found. In Isaiah 41:4;—45:6;—48:12;—and in Rev. 22:13;—it is plainly intended to express what appertains exclusively to the divine and the eternal; and it must be so taken here. It is not a mere statement of the extent of Christ’s humiliation, from the estate of one first in honor to the estate of one lowest in disgrace; but a formula which sets forth the eter-

nity of God, and his high superiority to all created things. Creation had a beginning; but God was first, before creation, without beginning, himself the beginner. All created things are continually changing, and each particular style or order is for some end beyond itself; but God is last, abiding when all these changes have been wrought, and surviving every consummation, himself the end. As appropriated by Christ, it asserts his proper and eternal Deity, and his real participation in all that is characteristic of Godhead. It assigns him an existence before creation, and after all consummations, himself the beginner and the consummator. Before him none was, for he "was in the beginning with God;" and after him none shall be. He is the first, in that all things are from him; and the last, in that all things are to him and for him. The beginning was made from him, and everything will be consummated by him and in him. The first motion of the absolute, eternal, unapproachable Godhead toward outwardness of expression, calling the worlds into existence, and organizing all created things, was this Christ and Son of God; and that to which all creation, providence and grace is ordered and tending, and in which all is to have, not a cessation of existence, but the fulfilment of its ultimate purpose and accomplishment, bodying forth all the harmony, richness, beauty, glory and perfection of every divine thought and intent, is nothing more nor less than the conformation of all things to, and the setting out of the unspeakable fulness

of, this self-same Christ and Son of God. It is therefore a formula spanning the nature and philosophy of Godhead, in all his works, from the unsearchable depths of the eternal past, to the equally unsearchable depths of the eternal future, showing all to be from Christ, and by Christ, and to Christ, originating in him, perpetuated through all successions of change by him, and with their final consummation standing in and embodying his fulness. It is the title which Jehovah takes where he declares his eternal and universal creatorship, and his infinite superiority over all other beings: "Hearken unto me, O Judah, and Israel my called; I am he, I am the First, I also am the Last. Mine hand hath laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens." And when Jesus appropriates this description to himself, he identifies himself with the eternal Creator, and with the emphatic *I*, claims to himself what is distinctive of Godhead. Nor is he a whit less than God, though he did become man, and is now joined forever to a human nature.

"And THE LIVING ONE."\* This is another title of Deity. It refers not to mere manifested life, but to life inherent and underived. The words do not relate simply to the fact of Christ's having lived in the flesh, but to his possession of

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\* "Ὁ ζῶν expresses not so much that He, the Speaker, 'lived,' as that He was 'The Living One,' the Life (Jno. 1 : 4 ; 14 : 16), αὐτοζωῆς, having life in Himself, and the fountain and source of life to others."—*Trench on the Seven Epistles*, p. 70.

a deeper and self-existing life, of which that was only one manifestation. The life here claimed by Christ is life coeval with the creation of the world, and which had an eternal subsistence with the Father before the world was. John tells us that in Christ was life, and that that life was the same eternal life which was with the Father. (1 Jno. 1 : 1, 2.) All mere creatures are dying ones, except as their being is sustained by him who gave it; but God is the Living One, as life in him is self-existent. It needs no other to uphold it. It came from none, and it is sustained by none, but itself. Immortality may be imparted to creatures, but God only *hath* it in and of himself. And when Christ declares himself to be THE LIVING ONE, he claims and asserts a consubstantiality with the self-existent God, from whom all things proceed, and on whom all creatures depend.

And yet he "*became dead.*" It is impossible for our dull powers to penetrate the depths of these divine mysteries. When the ancient sage was asked to give a definition of God, he said, God is a circle, whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. He had expressed the truth, but under very contradictory conceptions. God is truly in every particular place, and yet beyond all place at the same time. He is in every place entire, as a centre, and yet he is bounded by no lines of limitation. Neither is he diffused, or scattered in parcels here and there, partly at one place and partly at another. This is true, but it is very confusing to our feeble com-



prehension. And we have like difficulty in explaining how Godhead is to be found, as in the Father, so in the Son, or how the self-existent and eternal could yet become dead. We are on safe and sure ground when we assert that God is ever-living, self-existent, and eternal; and that the same is true of the Christ and Son of God; and yet, it is equally true and certain, that this same Christ and Son of God, in that manifestation of his eternal life which he lived in human flesh, also died—as we say in the Creed, “*was crucified, dead, and buried.*” He who had life within himself from all eternity, he who was made the depository of all outward life before any creature was formed, became a dead person. All this, indeed, was accomplished in the flesh, in the man Christ Jesus; but it was that flesh and manhood to which The Living One was conjoined in one person. It is the same *I* who proclaims himself the First and the Last, and The Living One, who says that *HE* became dead. Some tell us that what was of the Divine substance in Christ withdrew when he died; this I cannot admit. It was

— “God the mighty Maker died  
For man the creature’s sin.”

If it was not so, then I am at loss to know what atoning power there could be in his death more than in that of any martyr to the truth. And yet there was no suspension of the continuity of that which is eternal and ever-living. That there was a certain emptying of himself on the part of Christ

in his humiliation and death is taught us. And that there was a certain quitting of the use and claim of his Godhood in his incarnation and submission to death—a certain putting of himself out of self-existing life in order to receive it again from the Father,—we must believe. But we must at the same time hold, that it was somehow The Living One that became dead, and the eternal life that had share in the mysterious immolation, giving virtue to the sacrifice, and imparting itself through it.

But this becoming dead is specially connected, and that with a note of exclamation, with another announcement, that this same who became dead is *alive, and living for the age of the ages*. The state of death was but for an instant, and was succeeded by a resurrection, which put him again in the possession and exercise of the attributes of the ever-living. He laid down his life that he might take it again, and thus gave the more brilliant proof that he is The Living One. The most successfully to show that the distinction belongs to one man to accomplish what no other man can accomplish, is to have the experiment made by each. “So God, in order to prove that Christ, and he alone, is The Living One, doth permit the many to come under the dominion of death; and having thus proved that no man is The Living One, he then bringeth Christ into the same controversy with death, who, by overcoming it, doth prove himself the Prince of Life, and the Master

of Death ; so that he could say, ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life.’ By being the Resurrection, he is proved to be the Life. He is not the Life in consequence of the resurrection, but in antecedence of it. The resurrection proves him to be that being in whom it had pleased God that it should reside as in an invincible fortress, which was tried and proved to be death-proof.”\*

Hence the further proclamation, “*and I have the keys of death and of hades.*” † It is hardly possible that the Saviour meant to represent death as a *place*. It is, however, a power, and a fearful power, locking up and holding tight all who come under its sway. What millions have gone down beneath that power, and are now held by it! Every acre of the earth is full of them, and the bottom of every sea. I have seen their grim skeletons on mountain summits, eight thousand two hundred feet above the level of the sea; and I have walked upon their ashes more than a thousand feet below that level. And from far deeper depths to still more elevated heights, on all the slopes and hillsides, and in all the fields and valleys of the earth, death’s victims lie in fetters of

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\* Irving *in loc.*

† “So all the best MSS. and Versions have it, while the reading of our Translation inverts the natural and logical order; for it is death which peoples hell or hades; it is a king of death who makes possible a kingdom of the dead (6 : 8; 20 : 13, 14); for by hell, or hades, this invisible kingdom or dominion of the dead is intended, and that in all its extent, not merely in one dark province of it, the region assigned to the lost.”—Trench *in loc.*

darkness, silence and dust. Even on the life-powers of the Son of God were these manacles made fast. But by him they were also opened ; for he hath the keys of death.

And as death holds the bodies of men, so hades holds their souls. There is an under world, intermediate between death and the resurrection, and the souls of all the dead are in that world, the good in rest and hope, and the wicked in unrest and fearful awaiting of judgment. I know not where it is, nor what it is. I only know that it is Paradise for the righteous, and anything but Paradise to all others—that all who die are retained there, shut in and locked up till the time of the fulfilment of this Apocalypse. It was into this “hell” that the soul of Christ descended when he expired, and where it would be retained till now, had he not been master of the keys, by which he opened its gates, and came forth to make this glorious declaration to his people. But the new cords of the Philistines could not tie down the strength of Samson, nor the gates of Gaza retain him in their custody. Whilst his enemies were shouting against him, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax when touched with fire, and the doors of the gates that were shut upon him, and their very posts, his shoulders bore away in everlasting triumph.

And those keys and potencies are still in his possession, and wielded by him. He giveth persons to death and hades, and retains them there,

as he will, and he brings them forth again at his pleasure, as he did the nobleman's daughter, the widow's son, and Mary's brother. When he arose, he not only brought his own soul forth, and his own body from the grave, but likewise those of other saints, levying tribute on those mysterious realms, as now their conqueror, and henceforth their Lord. And there is no hell so deep but he can open it, and thrust his enemies in, and lock it that they may never more come out. Nor is there any disability of the saints by reason of death or hades, nor any doors or bands locked upon them in their state of separation from the body, but he has the key to turn back the dingy bolts and set all such prisoners free. And as he said of old, "O death, I will be thy plague: O grave, I will be thy destruction;" the time is coming when he will apply those keys, and leave not a soul or body more in death or hades which shall not be brought forth in the power of his resurrection.

Some tell us that this was all spoken to John in his affright, that he might not be overwhelmed with his fears. But I cannot see how such grand and overpowering declarations of the majesty of Christ could add to the strength and confidence of a man already sinking and next thing to dead on account of the glory he was called to contemplate. It was the "Fear not," and the strength-imparting touch, that were for John's special benefit; but what is said more than that is the filling out of the picture on which the apostle had just been

gazing, and which he could not perhaps have endured to hear from Christ's own lips, but for this "Fear not," and assuring touch. No, no; let us not thus miss the great meaning of the Scriptures. It was not John's particular comfort, but the world's enlightenment, that was intended by these overwhelming proclamations. What the Saviour here utters in the terrified apostle's ears, the same as what had just passed before the apostle's astonished eyes, relates to the grand portraiture of Christ, as he now stands related to his churches and ministers, and as he will presently come to judge them. He is the First, and the Last, and The Living One. He is the same who died on Calvary's cross a sacrifice for our sins, and descended into hell as the vanquisher of all the dominions of darkness. Though once dead, and an inmate of hades, he is alive now for all the ages of ages. In this eternal life, which he had from all eternity, he walks among his people, looking and unlocking death and hades, disposing of souls and bodies as to him seems best, and keeping them in his own power for that Apocalypse and administration which it is the office of this book to describe. This is the Christ, in those great attributes, acts and offices, on whom the Churches are built, in whom our faith and hopes as Christians stand, and with whom we have to do as our Lord and Judge.

II. Hence the command, not with reference specifically to the apostle's fears, but with refer-



ence to the seven Churches, "*Write (οὕτως)\* therefore what thou sawest, and what they are, and what shall come to pass after these things.*"

Here, then, is the great starting-point, and grand foundation of this book, and the key to its true analysis. Assuming all the facts of the Gospel history,—the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ,—as accomplished; the Churches fully organized and equipped; the new dispensation established and in working order; the Apocalypse starts with a presentation of the character, titles, and administrations of our risen and glorified Lord in relation to the Churches, and the dispensation as then inaugurated. This first vision, and the proclamations and explanations connected with it, accordingly spans the whole interval from the time John wrote to the end of the dispensation, the outlines of which it sets forth. Christ is not one thing for one age and country, and another thing for another age and country. What he was then, and the characteristics and relations in which he then appeared, are those in which he now is to be contemplated, and in which he will continue until the entire

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\* "It is certainly a piece of carelessness on the part of our translators to have omitted, which none of the previous translators had done, the *οὕτως* (*therefore*), about the right of which to a place in the text no question has ever been made. With what intention the illative particle is used is perhaps best referred to what goes immediately before: Seeing that I am this mighty One, the first and the last, who was dead and am alive, do thou therefore write; for the things declared by me are all steadfast and sure."—Trench *in loc.*



economy reaches its consummation. And what he utters in the seven epistles is his judgment of the Church, his mind and decision with reference to it, not only as it then existed, but in its whole universality, and entire continuity, and multiform membership, from the commencement to the consummation, including the portion assigned to each and all when he comes.

Taking in, then, all that John saw and heard in his first vision, together with what he was commanded to write, we are carried down to the end of the third chapter. Everything to that point is received from one scene of observation, and holds together as belonging to one and the same order of things. From the same standpoint he sees and hears and writes it all. It is the same glorious Saviour that is first seen, then heard in the announcements concerning himself, in the explanations of what had been seen, and in the seven addresses to the seven Churches. From the first sound of the trumpet voice with which the Apocalypse begins, to the last "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," we find no break, no change, in the speaker, in the position of the seer, in the outlines of the picture, or in the course of the communications made. It is all ONE, cohering in all the parts, touching only the same subjects, and finishing up in a clean and perfect conclusion. What follows introduces us to quite other scenes, other characteristics, and other administrations. There is no coming back again to this after it is once left.

We then read no more of the Churches, or of Christ among the candlesticks. There is not anything of the order set forth in this first section after the third chapter. As perfect as the unity of everything up to the conclusion of the seven epistles, is the diverseness from it of everything that comes after.

Whatsoever then is signified by this vision of Christ among the candlesticks, its entire career is embraced. If it means the Church, it is the entire Church to its end in this world. If it is the present dispensation, it is that dispensation to its close. And if it be something else, it is that something to the conclusion of its history. This I consider important, and settled by the facts in the case. The whole character of the vision shows that it is not fragmentary or sectional, but complete. There is much coming after it, but the subject is no longer the same, and all the administrations are of a different order. What it sets forth is, therefore, the whole of it.

And with this point fixed, there is another equally important, which this command makes clear. As this vision embraces the entire career of that to which it refers, and stretches to the very end of its history, so what follows does not commence till what is signified by this first vision is accomplished. What there is more than was seen and heard in this instance, and in the accompanying explanations, is only to “come to pass *after these things*.” In other words, the things presented are as consecutive in their fulfilment as

in John's visions of them. What is contained in the first three chapters must run out and end, before what is contained in the subsequent chapters can begin. So that if we can ascertain what order of things that is which is set forth in the first vision, and whether it has run its course or still holds, we are in a position to know exactly whether what is to "come to pass after these things" is still future or not.

What have we then by which to identify what is contained in the first vision? Fortunately, the Saviour has not left us in uncertainty. His command to John was not only to write what he had seen, but also "*what they are.*" Nor was John unfaithful to the charge. He has written "what they are;" and we have the explanation in Christ's own words. "*The seven stars are [the] angels of the seven Churches, and the seven candlesticks are [the] seven Churches.*" Do you ask what Churches? The answer is, the Churches existing at the time of the vision. Not Churches in heaven, but Churches on the earth. Their very names and localities are given. So far, then, we are on solid ground. The vision is that of Christ in relation to his Churches on earth, or that economy of things which we call the Christian dispensation, which had come into full and settled force and sway at the time John wrote, and which exists now precisely as it existed then. There have been changes, but not in the laws of the dispensation, or in Christ's offices, relations, and administrations under it, or in it. We cannot, there-

fore, be mistaken. It is *the present Church, or order of things with respect to the Church*, which is the subject of this vision. And as the vision includes the whole course of that to which it relates, the present order, so far as respects the Church on earth, must wind up and close, before one particle of this book, beyond the third chapter, in any full and proper sense, can be fulfilled. And until people come to see and admit this, they will try in vain to understand or interpret this book.

Some maintain that we are now living under the sixth vial, and that nearly everything up to the eighteenth chapter has already been fulfilled. Nor will I dispute that there is a sense, dim and inchoate, in which this is true. Prophecy, in its fulfilment, is made up of several concentric circles, blended in the same general picture. It is said that history is continually repeating itself. Much truer is this of prophecy. But each fulfilment is in a higher fulness, till the last sums up all. There is but one proper and ultimate literal fulfilment of any prophecy; but, in anticipation of that there are typical and precursory fulfilments—preliminary rehearsals in advance of the grand performance. We can accordingly trace out in history a very interesting but not always distinct correspondence to what is contained in the first eighteen chapters of this book. But if that were the true and only fulfilment, so much learning and acquaintance with history would be necessary in order to track it through the multiplicity and complication of human events, that it

must needs remain an uncertain and second-hand thing to the great body of the Lord's people. I look then for another, simpler, more direct and easier understood fulfilment.

It has been said that the way for a missionary to approach a non-christian population is to "carry his Bible in one hand and Gibbon in the other, to show out of the pages of an infidel historian how exactly the prophets have up to the present time been fulfilled." But it will require more evidence than I have yet seen, to convince me that it is necessary to take men through the school of the historian, whether skeptic or not, in order to teach them the truth of Christianity, or the meaning of the prophets. The Scriptures are self-demonstrative and self-explanatory, if men will only read them as they are written, and let them speak for themselves. Valuable as history is, and much as may be made of Gibbon, we need neither of them to get at the true meaning of the Apocalypse. The early Christians had them not, and yet understood this book better than all the hundreds of learned commentators who think to verify their interpretations out of Gibbon and history. In other words, the exclusively historic school of interpreters, as things appear to me, do but darken and obscure this book with learned rubbish, and lend their influence to the mischievous notion that it is a book of wild and grotesque fables, and uncertain riddles, which it is wisdom, greatness and piety in a man never to touch.

Whilst, then, I admit that these predictions

may have had a dim, imperfect, but oft scarcely traceable fulfilment in the past, I am firmly convinced that the true and proper fulfilment of everything beyond the third chapter is to take place only after the Church has run its course, completed its history, and received its judgment. We are elsewhere told that "judgment must *begin* at the house of God." (1 Pet. 4: 17.) If that be true, then the judgment of the world is something subsequent, a judgment which takes place *after* the judgment of the Church. The Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, therefore, must be future, as the judgment of the world is future; for it is the judgment of the world that they foreshow. Read the Apocalypse in this view, and you will find it a new book to you, luminous and precious, which needs no infidel Gibbon to explain it, or to prove it to be of God.

III. Look we now a little more particularly into the mystery which John was directed to explain, and the explanation given—the mystery of the seven stars upon Christ's right hand, and of the seven candlesticks of gold.

In the language of Scripture, a "mystery" is something which man is capable of knowing, but can only know when it is revealed. So here, it is not beyond the range of our understanding to take in what these stars and candlesticks represent; but we know what they represent, not from our own wisdom or searching, but through God's revelation. *He tells us* that "the seven stars are [the] angels of the seven Churches, and the seven



candlesticks are [the] seven Churches," and a child at once understands what no sage could otherwise have known.

You will notice also that there is nothing in this vision to which the word *mystery* is applied, but the stars and the candlesticks. Everything else is its own explanation; that is, it is literal, and to be taken as it is written. The stars and candlesticks are symbolic, and stand for something which could not otherwise so well be fitted to the picture; but only these. We are thus furnished with several very important hints of interpretation. One is, that when the Scriptures employ symbols they tell you so. Another is, that where no indication to the contrary is given, we must interpret according to the letter. Another is, that what is symbolic and mysterious must have the mystery revealed to be correctly understood, and that what is revealed is no longer a mystery. This book, then, is not a book of symbols, as some speak. It is a book of *revelations*, as its own title declares; and revelations are not mysteries. Mystery and Apocalypse are correlative terms. (Rom. 16 : 25.) The one is the lifting off of the chief peculiarity of the other. We find mysteries or symbols in this book, but only exceptionally, and always accompanied with the proper note of indication, and the necessary ἀποκαλύψεις, or unveiling of what is meant.

The stars are mentioned first and have the most conspicuous place. They are the angels of the Churches. Stars are frequently employed as re



presentative of lordship and authority, if not in its centre, yet in its distributions around the centre. Symbolically they indicate high official place. They here denote the very highest officers of the individual Churches. They are called *angels*, and hence some have argued for an order of superhuman creatures. But the word *angel* is more descriptive of office than of nature. It means a *messenger*, one invested with a special commission. It can apply as well to men as to celestial orders. (Hag. 1 : 13; Mal. 2 : 7; 3 : 1.) And that it is here meant to apply to *men*, I gather from the delinquencies which are subsequently laid to the charge of some of these angels, and from the utter silence of the Scriptures with reference to any arrangement putting the Churches under the charge and instruction of heavenly beings. Some of the holy angels must be very naughty at times, and the ministers and Churches in very strange ignorance concerning an important part of their allegiance, or these mystic stars are but men of like passions with ourselves,—nothing more nor less than *ministers* in charge of the Churches; not only of the Churches named, but of all Churches in every age.

They are *stars* because they are illuminators, and because they are heads and leaders of the flocks over which the Holy Ghost hath placed them. They are *angels* or messengers, because God hath sent them, and made them his representatives, the guardians of his Churches, and the stewards of his mysteries. They are ambassa-

dors for Christ, as though God did beseech by them. They are, for the purposes of their office, "in Christ's stead." (2 Cor. 5 : 20.) In Daniel we read of heavenly angels, guardians of *nations*, and communicating with men in God's name; and here we have earthly angels, guardians of *Churches*, set and authorized to exercise their ministry in the name of Christ.

Nor is it only *bishops*, in the modern sense of that term, as some have argued, that we are to understand by these angels. They are *overseers* indeed, but not of sees consisting of many distinct churches. There was just one angel for one Church, not one angel for the seven Churches; and so each angel was simply the pastor in charge of his particular Church.

Upon the dignity and importance of this office I need not dwell. That is manifest in the fact that it stands foremost in this Revelation of Jesus Christ. "And well is it entitled to that pre-eminence, for without the ordinance of preaching there would be no Church; and without a Church there would be no Christian kingdom; and without a Christian Church and kingdom there would be no apostacy, no beast, no false prophet: so that the whole substance of this book, the whole drama of God's providence therein, doth derive itself out of the office of the preacher of the word, the angel, the sent one of Christ, the Christian pastor."\*

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\* Irving in *loc.*

“*And the seven candlesticks are [the] seven Churches.*” I have already sufficiently remarked upon the aptness of this symbol. If the ministers are *lightgivers*, the congregations are *lightbearers*—the organization for upholding the light. Hence the Church is elsewhere described as “the pillar and ground of the truth.” We must have Churches as well as ministers. This is the Divine order and constitution. “God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. There are many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.” (1 Cor. 12:18–22.) Yea, the whole Church, Christ the Head, the stars on his right hand, and the entire membership of believers clustered around them, are but one great mystic candlestick, for setting and holding forth the great light of salvation; which saves them that believe, and judges and condemns the world that lieth in unbelief and sin.

The number of these angels and Churches is *seven*. I must reserve for another occasion what I have to say upon the meaning of these numbers. There is a sacred arithmetic, as well as sacred persons, places, and times. Numbers in the Scriptures are as significant as words. They are as much a part of the Apocalypse as anything else. And there is as much resting upon them, as upon any other class of particulars contained in this

book; as we shall see when we come to consider them. There were more Churches than these seven in existence when John received this commission; and some of more prominent standing than several of those named. But the number was fixed at *seven*, no more and no less, and to these particular seven for reasons which will appear in due time.

There is yet one point in this mystery of the stars and candlesticks to which I will refer. It is the realm in which they are stationed, and its characteristics as indicated in the provision made for it. Where you see stars, and need candles, there is darkness. And how dark is that world, that kingdom, that community, that heart, into which the light of Christianity has not effectually penetrated? With all the splendor of its genius, all the glory of its arms, all the brilliancy of its power, how savage, how beastly, how like a sepulchre, full of chilly gloom and festering death! When the Gospel first arose upon the world, in what state did it find mankind? Let the apostle answer: "Given up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts; filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; doing these things, and having pleasure in them that do

them." (Rom. 1 : 22-32.) The same had been true for ages—their governments, fierce beasts and monsters; their morals, selfishness and vain-glory; their very gods deified vices and bad passions. And when God's messengers came to them with the light of truth and righteousness, how were they treated? Let the same apostle answer: "Some were tortured; and others had trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; compelled to make their homes in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." (Heb. 11 : 35-38.) Even the Lord of the covenant was crucified and killed, and all his apostles martyred, and the Church's first age made one continuous baptism of blood by the enthroned malignity of the unsanctified heart. Such is humanity, unreached and unredeemed by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Such it was, and such it is, and such it always will be, as long as the world stands. And this is the realm in which God has stationed his candlesticks and his angels. Well might the Saviour say: "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves." (Luke 10 : 3.)

Those stars and candlesticks have not been useless. Some hearts, communities and kingdoms have been attracted by the light, and have learned to appreciate its transforming beauty, and are found to a greater or less degree walking and re-

joicing in it. But still the world in the main is a dark and wicked world. The light sent of God is "a light that shineth in a dark place," and will so continue "until the day dawn," for the great consummation. Till then, therefore, we must expect to suffer and to fight. While the light will never fail to make itself felt upon the dark world, neither will the depravity and darkness of earth fail to make itself felt upon us. The wheat and the tares, good and evil, Christ and Antichrist, are side by side, each at war with the other, and the conflict ever increasing in intensity, until the Lord of the harvest shall come with his reapers, and make the separation by removing the candlesticks, and giving over what remains to its own proper darkness, and "the blackness of darkness forever." God make us faithful in our work of waiting and witnessing till the silver note from heaven shall sound the signal for our release, and welcome us to the glad home of light and rest!  
Amen

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